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" Didn't you explain to Mr. Barradale that his real duties as secretary would be to me,
Mr. Clark?"



IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

A TALE OF WASHINGTON LIFE

BY

HARRIET RIDDLE DAVIS

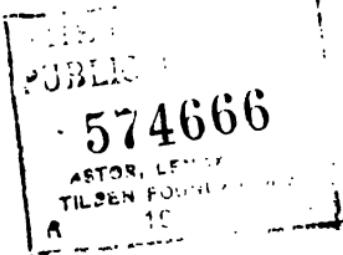
AUTHOR OF "THE CHAPEL OF EASE,"
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List of Illustrations.

	PAGE
" Didn't you explain to Mr. Barradale that his real duties as secretary would be to me, Mr. Childs?" <i>Frontispiece.</i>	
The door-handle was rattled more vigorously, and a frightened voice said, " Sandy, unlock your door!"	87
Papa stood on the curbstone, perplexed whether to follow me or to wait for mamma	165
" Don't grieve so, child."	212



IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

CHAPTER I.

TOLD BY STEPHEN.

OF course a man who narrates his own experiences, who talks of himself, and who chronicles events both great and small, must necessarily lay himself open to being called garulous, perhaps even vain. So I must submit to being charged with these petty crimes in trying to give an account of the queer position I occupied with these new people. I cannot remember at any time in my whole existence, not even during occasional periods of mellow ness, that I have ever had a very exalted or roseate opinion of my own achievements in life. On the contrary, I can count various distinct times that I have had heavy reckonings with myself, in which I have administered severe and well-deserved mental kicks, notably in my affair with Mrs. Romney. But this last turn of the

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

wheel left me in a dull state of amazement which wiped out all previous experiences. Let me state the situation in bold, clear English, without any softening of the outlines or garnishing of the truth.

I, Stephen Barradale, for the sum of thirty-five hundred dollars a year, agreed to become the polite lackey to these new people. I agreed to keep the Madam's visiting-book, to make out her visiting-list, to order her State functions, and to introduce Washington high life to her. These, in plain terms which could not be blinked, were the duties that were meant in the bond, although at the time I failed to understand them, to my everlasting regret be it said.

I suppose I could never have had any ambition, for I remember that as a little chap my desire was to grow up to be a street-car driver. The only stumbling-block to me in this glorious career was my indecision as to whether I should run a car on F Street or on the Avenue. That was as long ago as when we boys used to drop a penny into the little stone gutter in the Capitol grounds, up by the old fish-pond, and watch it roll along on end till it would come out at the big gates at the entrance, and there, unless we were spry, would be swallowed up in the mud and slime of the open drain that ran across the pavement. Those were the days when the sluggish old Tiber Creek flowed across the Avenue, covered over with a primitive wooden culvert, not always a safe conduit by

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

any means. Sometimes there was a rickety wooden hand-rail along its sides, oftener there wasn't. Then beyond the Tiber were all the little one-eyed shops that lined the streets on one side down as far as Shillington's book-store, the whole presided over by the ugly old *Globe* building. At Shillington's we used to stand on tiptoe and flatten our noses against the window-panes to see the last prints in the picture papers, or, what was more likely still, we used to follow some passing drum and fife; for, even though the war had long been over, there were always troops in our midst, and old dilapidated blue army wagons hobbling along through the mud-holes of the Avenue. But I don't remember even while following the inspiring fife and drum ever having had any martial spirit or any fervor to become anything in life, not even a soldier. Clearly, I must have been without it in my composition, for later at Young's school the spark was not lighted, nor after that at college were there any stirrings of ambition that I can recall. I don't remember ever having been an actual disgrace in my studies, but I was always content to scratch through narrowly, provided I stood well in the college team.

No, that jade Fate has played me two unworthy tricks. It is true that she has endowed me liberally in some respects, for I think I may lay claim to brains, to superior physique, and certainly, without any undue vanity, to a

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

kind of masculine good looks ; but she stopped there. She did not give me the wherewithal, that nameless faculty for making life a success. But, far worse than that, she cursed me with birth in the District of Columbia.

I have never been able to decide just where in these sixty square miles that make up the District the mischief lies that seems to play the devil with the most of us who have been afflicted with birth here. Certain it is that few of the native-born have ever attained anything in the way of success, and I am conspicuously not one of the few. There seems to be an enervation, a sort of mental malaria afloat, that lays waste, kills, or perverts any energy or ambition that nature might have endowed us with.

I don't know just what I expected to do with my life when I came home after graduation. I may have had some ideas on the subject before I left my alma mater, but, if so, as soon as I felt the lazy, paralyzing atmosphere of my native place again, everything became uncomfortably vague, and, although I was confronted with the fact that I had my own living to earn, I was just about as much in the dark as to how I was going to do it as the traditional unborn babe. I know I had a pretty bad quarter of an hour, which somehow has managed to stretch itself over the best part of my life so far.

But in all sober earnestness, while I am reviewing the situation and damning myself for being what I am, I ask what chance a fellow

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

has to make a start in life if he remains in the District? There is no business save the small trades that go to supply the town, and the professions hold little or no inducements. No lawyer may ever rise beyond a modest local recognition: there can never be the goal of the Supreme Bench before him, he may not even hope to attain an ordinary District judgeship; for the Executive, with always a political debt to pay or a political future to consider, will not choose from a community behind which is neither State nor vote, and the same reason holds against various other positions within his gift. No one ever seems to consider the nonentity who is without the ballot.

Nevertheless, I made an attempt at a profession. I have now somewhere in my possession a framed certificate of graduation at a law school and one of subsequent admission to the bar. Then I tried for a consulate, or a secretaryship in a foreign embassy. I was not even particular where it should be, so long as it was in the diplomatic service; and upon this strong and influential pressure was brought to bear, but somehow it never came to anything. Then I tried going into a brokerage business. This seemed at last to be the very road to quick fortune, but here was disappointment again. An unsuspected strain in me of a certain inherited scrupulousness unfitted me for the turnings and twistings which this business seems to demand, and I finally abandoned it. Then,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

whimsically enough, my mind reverted to my ambition as a little chap to be a street-car driver. By Jove ! it wasn't a half-bad idea to stand on the platform of one of those slow-crawling green or yellow cars which do not get over the ground any faster than our citizens do on foot. Well, after months of waiting, wasted in the vain hope that something would turn up, I finally sauntered, or stumbled, or fell, without further struggle, and naturally without enthusiasm, into the great engulfing arms of the government. A department door swung behind me and swallowed me up, and I became a machine, a thing without ambition, individuality, or illusions. I was Stateless, homeless, and voteless.

Owing partly to my inclinations, which have ever led me to seek social distinction, and partly to the birthright of my old name, there have been few doors in the polite world that have not been open to me ; and this, together with the fact that I knew the ins and outs of social life here so thoroughly, was the means of springing the trap in which I was caught, and is the why and wherefore of this tirade and of my calling myself a spade.

Through all my meanderings in life, while there are some shady and unsavory spots, still I have always managed to keep a fair amount of self-respect, but this self-respect, like Bob Acres's courage, oozed entirely before the inglorious combination of circumstances. For

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

though I might delude myself with being the private secretary to a Secretary, and might even occasionally do his confidential writing or take down his private letters in short-hand, in reality I could not blink the fact that I was only the secretary to a Secretary's wife. My good and honored father would have turned in his admiral's grave had he known of it. And why did I submit to such a position? Well, partly from lack of energy and ambition, and partly from a misapprehension in the first place. It all happened simply enough, too.

I reached my desk rather late one morning, and knew that in all probability I should be docked for it; for it is one of the pleasing customs of this administration to know all the small doings of its employees and to keep a tally on all who are in the least derelict. I remember that as I passed the door-keeper he glanced at me sharply, and as I sprang up the stone steps that led to my corridor I knew a pencil-mark had gone down against my name. On entering our division and going to my desk, Billings looked up from his work and said,—

“A messenger has been in here looking for you, Barradale.”

“Anything up?” I asked, half startled; for another pleasing custom of department life is that one's tenure of office hangs continually in mid-air, like Mohammed's coffin, with birds of evil omen circling about it.

“Don't know,” he replied; then, lowering

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

his voice and making a significant motion of his hand, he said,—

“ Miss Johns has just received a yellow envelope.”

I glanced across at Miss Johns and saw her with her face buried in her arms on the desk before her; at her side the fateful yellow envelope; on the floor the crumpled letter of dismissal; and not a clerk in the whole room but had suspended work to pity her and to shudder in silence for himself. At the sight of her bowed head and the despair of her attitude, the gorge rose in me. Involuntarily my hand clinched and my lips curled in contempt for a great government run upon such lines, where faithfulness and ability go absolutely for naught, and where civil service is a daily lie.

However, I had little time to indulge in contempt for my government, or in pity for Miss Johns. I felt that my own time had come. A messenger came hurrying in through the swinging green baize door and said to me,—

“ The chief clerk wants to speak to you, sir.”

Billings looked at me while this message was being delivered, as much as to say, “ Your time has come.”

I stepped out into the corridor and made my way leisurely to the room of the chief clerk. As I went along I wondered what was up, what the complaint was to be, or, if it should prove to be outright dismissal, what the cause was. I recalled with certainty that I had paid

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

my assessment to the campaign fund, and that I had carefully held my tongue about some remarkable doings under the new head of a certain division. By the time I had reached the end of the corridor I was convinced in my rapid review that there was nothing of a serious nature to be charged against me. As I entered the chief clerk's room he nodded to me in his usual brusque way and went on with some writing. There was nothing for me to do but to await his pleasure or leisure. In a few moments he swung around in his chair and looked me over in a cool, contemplative sort of way, and finally, after a more lengthy survey of me than was agreeable, he condescended to jerk out a few curt sentences :

"Mr. Barradale, the Secretary has asked me to send him some one who has certain qualifications and a certain kind of knowledge about—well, he will explain to you better than I can. I am informed that you are well equipped for what he wants. I think perhaps you may do. You will please present yourself to the Secretary immediately and say to him that Mr. Blunt thinks you are the man he is looking for. Good-morning."

He turned back to his desk, and I was dismissed. I was more surprised than I had been for many a long day, and immediately took up my line of march for the office of the Secretary. As I traversed the endless stone corridors, I wondered what the qualifications

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

and knowledge were that I was supposed to possess, and what the Secretary proposed to do with them when he got them. I had never been sent for by the chief before, being altogether too subordinate ever to be wanted.

When I reached the anteroom I found it filled with the usual crowd that always belongs to the waiting-room of a Secretary. There were one or two Congressmen, various applicants and supplicants, and at least two cranks, among the number, and on one and all of their faces were stamped hurry and anxiety. I had to cool my heels for a long time, and to see one after another admitted into the inner room while I was consumed with impatience, curiosity, and not a little apprehension. At last I sent in my name, and was promptly asked to state my business ; but, as that was just what I could not do, I had to say that Mr. Blunt, the chief clerk, had sent me upon the Secretary's own order. This brought me into the Secretary's presence at once.

He was in the midst of a low-toned conversation with some one, and merely glanced at me in an absent sort of way.

As I stood about waiting for him to give me his attention, I had ample time to study him.

The Honorable Horatio Childs had been appointed to a Cabinet portfolio from the West, and political report had it that his appointment was a direct reward for the vast sums of money he had contributed out of his own wealth to

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

the campaign. Be that as it may, in the short time since the new administration had come in he had already proved himself one of the strongest and ablest men in the Cabinet, and, unless I was much mistaken, he was going to prove the soundest financier the department had known in many a year. He was a natural-born organizer and handler of men, and I was soon to learn that he had the sternest sense of uprightness and was the most single-purposed man I had ever met. Afterwards I often wondered how, with such a make-up, coupled with high-strung mental sensitiveness and irritability, he ever became a successful politician. He was tall and slight in build, with fast-whitening hair. His eyes were keen, though kindly, and he had that peculiar twang or intonation in his voice, accompanied by occasional slips in pronunciation or speech, which belongs to some parts of the country and which marks the self-made man who has been too busy or too indifferent to free himself from the illiteracies peculiar to his section. As I stood aside, watching his quiet gestures and catching the tones of his quick nervous speech, I felt the power of the man; and it was evident that the man to whom he was talking felt it also. The Secretary walked a few steps towards the door with the man, where they paused for a few moments in parting; then he turned back and approached me; but it was evident that my name and business had slipped

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

from his mind, for he said, in a quick, irritable voice,—

“What can I do for you, sir?”

I could not prevent a smile of amusement creeping into my face at the idea of being sent on an unknown mission and then having it demanded of me in this stand-and-deliver fashion. I replied, with some little dignity,—

“I do not know what you can do for me, Mr. Secretary—that is just what I have come here to find out. Mr. Blunt, the chief clerk, sent me to you and told me to say to you that I am the man you are looking for. My name is Barradale.”

“Oh! ah! yes,” replied the Secretary, fixing his eyes on me piercingly and uncomprehendingly. Then his face lighted up. He smiled broadly. Memory had come to him.

“Mr. Barradale, come to my desk. Sit down: I want to talk to you.”

I took the seat he indicated. He settled himself at his desk and seemed in no hurry to enlighten me as to why I had been summoned. Just then a messenger brought in a card. A darkening look came over the Secretary's face as he read it. He said, curtly,—

“Ask him to wait a few moments, and don't admit any one until I ring.” Then he turned to me and spoke rapidly,—

“Mr. Barradale, I have need for the services of a private secretary, and I want some one who has been in Washington long enough to

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

become acquainted with life here, some one who knows the ropes thoroughly, both in official and social circles. In the press of business in the department I have not had time to look about for myself. I have asked Mr. Blunt to send me some one thoroughly qualified for my purpose. He mentioned you, and tells me you have been in the department four or five years, that you stand well in your office. I understand that you were born in the District, that your people were of social importance here, that your father was an admiral in the navy, and that you yourself know every phase and every side of life here. Is this right?"

He paused and looked inquiringly at me. I was so dumfounded that I scarcely knew how to reply. I finally said,—

"Yes, Mr. Secretary, it is true that my father was an admiral in the navy, that I was born in the District, and that I know life here well."

"Then it seems that you are just the man I want. Will you undertake the work?"

I hesitated, and stammered, "Mr. Secretary, I feel honored by your offer, but——"

I did not know how to go on. This was a chance that had never come in my way before, but it was all so sudden. He had not said how permanent such work would be, nor defined what would be expected of me; and I could not burn my bridges without knowing something more definite. This keen man must

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

have read me through and through, for he said, with a half-cynical smile,—

“Mr. Barradale, you shall lose nothing by your services to me. I will be frank with you. I want some one who is capable of serving me in various ways. I want a confidential man about me who will attend to my private correspondence, who perhaps will sometimes be sent to look after my private business when the pressure of public affairs will prevent me from thinking of my own concerns ; but also I want —” Here he stopped as if he did not know just how to go on. He began again with some hesitancy :

“Mr. Barradale, I am a man of simple tastes and habits. I know little of the life here, and I shall always be too busy to do more than what is actually required of me socially, but I want my family to take the position that they will be entitled to, and which my means will justify. I do not want any mistakes made at the outset. I feel that if I have some one near me who knows all about these things and how they are done in Washington——”

There was a pause, and for a moment we looked each other squarely in the eyes. In a sudden flash I seemed to read more than his lips would say. Unconsciously a picture filled in the background. I thought that I fully understood the situation and all that his words had so delicately implied. There had been one or two lapses in his speech which grated

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

on my Southern ear, and it was almost impossible to reconcile them with the man before me ; but the steady look in his eyes seemed to challenge me and to compel me to acknowledge his intellectual ascendancy. I found myself saying with fervor and almost with eagerness, which were utterly foreign to me usually,—

“Mr. Secretary, you may command me in any way ; I will serve you to the best of my ability.”

He replied quietly, but in a tone of kindly appreciation of my decision,—

“I am glad, Mr. Barradale. We will talk further about this. I will send for you later in the day, when I have a little more leisure. I think you won’t regret your decision.”

He rose to dismiss me, and, touching his bell, said to the messenger who appeared,—

“Show in Senator Reagan.—Good-morning, Mr Barradale.”





CHAPTER II.

TOLD BY STEPHEN.

SOME one has said that "It is the first step that costs," but I am inclined to dispute this wise old saw, for it was by no means the first step which cost me anything, unless I could so call the sudden feeling of freedom which took possession of me as soon as I had sent in my resignation to the department.

This took place some time in July, and I entered upon my new duties with an enthusiasm that I had never felt before for anything that I can remember. I was surprised to find with how little difficulty I fitted into the position of private secretary. Partly from my long experience in the smart world, and partly from inheritance, I possessed a certain amount of tact which made it easy for me to estimate accurately, to remember and place everybody who approached the chief. Whenever, as was sometimes the case, it fell to me to stand between him and the horde of annoying, persistent men, often men of note, who frequently couched their wants in the form of demands

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

or half-concealed threats, who had to be denied and yet who must not be offended, I think I showed a positive genius.

The pressure that was brought to bear upon the Secretary during these first months of his incumbency was something stupendous, and as I came to have some comprehension of the magnitude of the inside workings of a great government, I found that various cherished and deep-rooted notions which had grown up with me would have to be got rid of. As the long, oppressive days slipped by and I watched this man, grasping in his strong hands all the petty details of the department, meeting every demand upon his brain and strength with a vigor and judgment that staggered me, I confess that the narrow lines upon which my ideas had been formed seemed suddenly to fade, a wider vista opened before me, and I felt for the first time the stirrings of ambition. The blood leaped in my veins in a way that gave me a new sensation; I felt that, given the chance, I too might be the shaper of a nation's policy.

These days were terribly enervating and hot. July was doing its worst in scorching the parks, in melting the pavements, and in bringing to the surface of the town all the queer waifs and strays that one does not notice much when the streets are not so empty and things are not so dead.

Somehow I am always reminded of a great

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

river which in its course has many still places where the water is darker-colored, perhaps stagnant, and its surface covered with bits of wood and all manner of half-worn and rotten stuff that have been flung there or have drifted into the haven out of the hurry and turmoil of the stream. Just such a bit of still water is Washington when the summer fairly sets in. Then it is that the odds and ends of humanity that have drifted in and lodged here come to the surface and stand out prominently against the background of deserted streets and empty parks.

I never seemed to notice before how many of these half-cracked waifs there were here. They have wandered for years familiar figures through the corridors of public buildings, upon the promenades, in and out, always mysterious, always strange, and yet always more or less known. They somehow inevitably find their way past the vigilant watch kept to guard the door of high places, and I had to do battle with many of them as they drifted in past the door-keeper into the Secretary's anteroom, where they had no business and from which they had to be unceremoniously hustled. During my first month in the Secretary's office I developed quite a knack in dealing with these odds and ends of humanity. There was that strangest of all deformities, the "soldier boy," as he is familiarly known, whose head has grown to such enormous proportions that

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

his frail, puny body is weighed down by it, and he is always topped off by a huge, battered old blue army cap which has earned him his *sobriquet*. He came to beg for an interview with the Secretary and to enlist his aid in his behalf. He had sold his head to a medical college for the sum of five thousand dollars. They were kindly to allow him the use of it during his natural life, but, alas ! they were not paying down their money nor keeping their part of the bargain. Would Secretary Childs help him recover damages ? I said politely but firmly that Secretary Childs couldn't and wouldn't.

I had only escaped from the "soldier boy" to fall into the clutches of number two in the army of nondescripts. This was Jane Thurston, who was most original in her demands. She owns the United States, and wants to dispose of some part of it in order to realize something. She told me in confidence that she would not ask much for the land and only three cents a head for the people, so it would be a bargain, and if the Secretary would help her to bring up her claim before Congress she would give him a handsome fee ; perhaps the State of Maine would satisfy him, if not, she would throw in Vermont. Well, I had to choke off, as best I could, this poor cracked woman, who is known to every lawyer and official in the District. But the worst of all my encounters was with the burly, herculean,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

swarthy Frankenstein who was found standing just within the door of the anteroom one morning when I rushed in from executing some mission outside the department. There he stood, perfectly immovable and absolutely silent. The messenger had disappeared, the door-keeper was gone, and the whole room was deserted of its usual applicants and visitors. I thought, as I glanced at the terrible object, that I understood fully the desertion manifest upon all sides. I knew the reputation that the mysterious Frankenstein bore, for he is never known to speak to any one, and woe to him who is brave enough to accost him. He shaves his forehead far back, and then paints the back of his neck black to represent hair. His shoulders are built up and padded far beyond nature's limits. His hands never appear below his sleeves, but are hidden therein, and the rest of his dress is correspondingly strange and hideous. He will take up a position in some prominent place and stand for hours without moving.

I did not know what to do with him, whether to speak to him or to let him stand there. While I was debating, one or two people came through the door from the corridor, evidently intending to send in a card to the Secretary, but one and all fled precipitately upon seeing the occupant of the room. I finally made up my mind to accost him. I said, in a most courteous tone,—

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"Do you wish to send in your card to the Secretary? This is Cabinet day, and he will not return from the White House for some little time."

There was no response, no change of attitude, even no quiver of the eyelashes. When some time later the Secretary came in and saw with amazement this strange visitor, I motioned him not to speak. I followed him into his inner room and there explained to him as much as I knew of the mysterious Frankenstein. It was decided to let him stand where he had taken up his position and to leave him unmolested. There he stood the livelong day, and always in the same attitude. Just a few minutes before the department closed, when we were wondering how we should get rid of him, Frankenstein disappeared. No one knew where he went or saw him go, but there was a sigh of relief from the Secretary down to the door-keeper.

So the summer wore away, filled to me with congenial duties, and long before its close I knew that the Secretary felt for me a strong personal liking, and many were the hours that I found myself admitted to an intellectual companionship I never had known in my whole life before. He discussed with me almost every known question and topic of the day. I often was led on by him to talk more openly than perhaps I ought to have done, considering my position. He would pause in his nervous

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

pacing up and down to look at me and to follow my rapid and blunt utterances. Sometimes these would take the form of fierce denunciations of the spoils system of government, or the abuses practised in his own department; or perhaps I dared in my vehemence even to criticise the Chief Executive; or, more likely still, I would hold forth on the disfranchisement and mode of governing the District of Columbia. He would say, emphatically,—

“Stephen, you ought to be out growing up with a State. We need such young, vigorous blood as yours. I didn’t know any one in the District felt or cared about these questions. You put things strongly.”

He would study me for a moment or two and then would resume his pacing. He often called me Stephen even during these early days, and I liked to hear him do so, for this man’s magnetism, or force, or personality, or whatever it was, had already fast bound me to him, and holds me now, the strongest tie I know.

Late in the summer I made a trip with him to Saratoga. The nature of it and the why and wherefore were not divulged to me, but I was not long in discovering for myself that the Secretary was assisting at a monetary conference at which were present the ablest financiers from all over the country, irrespective of party lines. But the Secretary never talked to me openly about it, and I of course never alluded

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

to the object of this gathering of notable men ; and so quietly were their meetings conducted that nothing ever transpired in regard to it. Later he sent me to look after some business of a private nature. Then I learned how vast his interests were, what heavy responsibilities he lived under.

He commended me warmly for my management of his affairs, and said that he thought it would be a good thing to make me his business agent rather than his secretary. He seemed to be turning me over in his mind, which was a way he had of doing, and I wondered if he found me wanting.

I of course came in contact with my former associates in the department, and I tried to do all that I could to help Miss Johns to a reinstatement of the position she had lost. I knew my place too well to presume upon my nearness to the Secretary to bespeak his interest in her behalf ; but one day when he was discussing civil service I had an opportunity of taking the opposite view in the matter, and I cited her case as an illustration of the utter fallacy of civil service reform as I knew it to be practised. This drew out a question or two from him and some admissions from me. Several weeks later, there was a bomb-shell explosion. The new chief of a certain division was displaced, my old office was entirely overhauled, and in the general shaking up and rearrangement Miss Johns was given a desk. She never knew,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

however, that I was instrumental in her reinstatement. Of course I knew that the Secretary had been investigating things for himself, and from a number of changes and various new rules which were promulgated it was evident that he had found just grounds for interference and reform.

During the months I had been with him, one thing had struck me very forcibly, that he was a man who lived a singularly solitary life ; I mean that inner solitariness which must ever go hand in hand with a certain keen, high-strung, nervous intellectuality. I had had glimpses into his life and into his mind that made me think this, and I remember once in the course of a conversation concerning the influence that other minds have upon us, he quoted a line which was to the effect that in the original nature of everything there was the power given to preserve its existence, that each ought to strive for the great right of sovereignty which was naturally his. He said,—

“ Stephen, this idea has always had a powerful influence upon me. I have perhaps lived too much in it.”

He paused, and seemed to be pursuing some train of thought in far-away regions where I could not follow. I asked him finally, in a puzzled way, how it happened that with such a precept he had ever entered public life, or had been prevailed upon to accept a portfolio. He replied, with a sudden smile,—

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"Oh, Stephen, after all, we men 'love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues.' It is the touch of servility that underlies the make-up of all men : we want to look down upon those beneath us, and we are even willing for some to stand above us. I read somewhere the other day a clever thing by some writer who said that we are continually living over again the story of the creation ; that in the first order of things beasts were created and brought before Adam that he might give them names and places in the universe and that he might have dominion over them, but nowadays the human animal comes himself before his own kind and begs for a place, and cries, 'Give me a name, give me a title, that I may not be naked and ashamed.' "

There was a touch of humorous contempt in his tone that brought an answering smile to my face, yet I was impressed by his remark, as indeed I was with almost all his utterances.

He had seldom talked of his family, but once or twice he had mentioned names that I supposed must belong to them. Once, when alluding to the prolonged absence in Europe of a grown child, he said, half bitterly,—

"Oh, well, it is only nature for the flower to fall from the stem."

I did not know whether this child whom he alluded to was a son or a daughter, for he was a reserved man in personal matters, and somehow I did not happen to ask the question.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

Towards the end of September, one quiet day, he received a telegram. He came to me with a half-troubled face, holding it in his hand, and said,—

“Stephen, my family will be here to-morrow night. It is high time they came and we were settled permanently somewhere, but—”

He stopped, and did not finish the sentence.

Of course I could not know what was in his mind. It seemed natural enough to me that they should come. Indeed, I wondered why they had not come before, and I said, warmly,—

“I am glad for your sake, Mr Secretary, that they are coming. It has been a long, hard summer.”

He made no reply, but twirled the telegram in his hand and seemed to be considering. There flashed over me suddenly a recollection of our first interview, when he had alluded to his family and had expressed a desire to have some one near him who was familiar with social and official life. I wondered if he were going to say something about it now, and glanced at him half expectantly. As I met his eyes it seemed to me for an instant as if there were a mute appeal in them, but I could not be sure. He stood a moment longer, but did not speak, and finally turned back to his private room and shut the door noiselessly.

I did not dream that these were practically our last undisturbed days together. I went on with my writing, with a running accompani-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

ment of thoughts in the background. I had a well-defined impression that there was some element or some unrestrained force in the Secretary's life that left him solitary. What could it be? He had alluded to an absent child almost pathetically, although he had clothed his speech in the dress of philosophy. I felt sure that, whatever it was that disturbed his life, he himself was blameless.

No, decidedly it is not the first step which costs. It is the step in between, or the last and final step, or the step aside, but not the first step. At least it was so with me.





CHAPTER III.

TOLD BY STEPHEN.

IT was only a few days after the arrival of the Secretary's family that I was invited to meet them and to dine with them at their hotel. It was now the very end of September, and almost a midsummer heat still prevailed. At the appointed time I set out languidly to keep my engagement. I live at the club, and have lived there ever since the breaking up and final scattering of my family. It has always seemed to me that to a homeless man club salt is on the whole a good deal less tasteless than any other, and is rather calculated to make one feel less keenly one's bereft condition : so the club holds for me my Lares and Penates, and it has been said of me that I have the gait and manner that always mark the inveterate club *habitué*. But with us we are so cosmopolitan that I doubt if any one could recognize any such stamp, which same cannot be said of our neighboring clubs. For who in this part of the world does not know a man from the Maryland, or from the Westmoreland, or even,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

be it said with bated breath, from the Union? But our men, belonging as they do to every nation that is accredited here, make it difficult to fasten upon us any imputation of sectionalism.

When I stepped out from the electric glare of the club, the streets were unlighted and utterly dark, and they were as sultry as they were dark. It happened to be one of our periods of corporation gaslight, when the moon ought to have shone and did not, which failure on her part was by no manner of means the concern of anybody or anything in the District, save Nature herself. The city fathers have no part nor parcel, apparently, in the general arrangement of things. Therefore I walked rather mincingly and carefully along past familiar houses that were shut up, silent and lightless, past the park with its great historic trees looming up in the night, past the statue of "Old Hickory," which the friendly darkness hid from me, but which I knew still stood where it had stood for so many years pawing the air in mid-heaven, with its cocked hat waving in the breeze,—or at least it would wave if it did not weigh a ton or two; and I smiled to myself as I recalled the tale of how Charles Sumner had hurried Thackeray past this same statue, hoping that the great novelist would not remark upon it, and when they were almost safely by Thackeray had asked slyly what had become of the rockers.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

There was no breath of air, no stirring of the leaves. An occasional tree-toad or belated cricket that sang or chirped from the shrubbery of the park gave me a sudden boyish feeling of homesickness or longing—for what? I could scarcely have told.

I had been vaguely picturing to myself these new people whom I was going to meet for the first time. I had only a mild curiosity regarding them. I had somehow thought of Mrs. Childs as a comfortable, motherly woman who would doubtless accentuate the occasional inaccuracies or illiteracies of the Secretary. I had even fancied that her face would be marked with sweet, deep lines that would convey an idea of ripe sense and wise and prudent thought. With this picture in my mind I was therefore totally unprepared for the woman to whom I was presented. The Secretary had scarcely named me to her when a conviction as strong as it was sudden flashed over me that here was the element or force which left him in the midst of his strenuous life a lonely man.

She was not more than forty-five years of age. I could easily imagine that she had been handsome in a highly colored way which sometimes passes muster in the first flush of youth, but which with the touch of time becomes hard and florid and degenerates into an uncompromising hopelessness. Although she was neither very tall nor large, she somehow conveyed the idea of large proportions. Her hair

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

was dark, her eyes were hard and shining, her mouth was drawn in a straight, unyielding line, and her voice had the most penetrating, pervading tone I had ever heard.

The only other member of the family who was present was a half-grown son, neither boy nor man, at that abominable age so trying to everybody nearest to him ; when a mother rests her irritated soul in the memory of his babyhood and shuts her eyes to the possibilities of coming years : an age when his nature has not escaped from the barbarism which seems to be the normal state of the young male, as I remember only too well, when he picks up the semi-vices of men and is loud and rude from impulse. He had an enlarged baby face, soft and handsome, relieved by a strongly marked brow, that was the exact counterpart of the Secretary's. His hair was cut in that hideous fashion which is so much affected by the youth of the present foot-ball age. He called his father "governor" and his mother "old lady," and I felt an absolute certainty that it would be a matter of only a short time before I should be dubbed "old chap" or "chappie." And yet, somehow, I liked the young cub from the first moment.

I do not know just how I had gained the impression that there were others in the Secretary's family. I know that I was half expecting all that evening that some one else would appear who would make the group more nearly

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

complete, but dinner was announced and served and no one else joined us.

My attention had been caught and held early in the evening by a photograph of a beautiful girl, or so she seemed to be with all the latest arts of the photographer brought to bear upon her. The picture stood on a small table, and my glances kept wandering towards it continually. This did not escape the quick, restless eyes of Mrs. Childs, who said finally, in a curt tone,—

“ That is a picture of Constance, Mr. Childs's daughter.”

I was so surprised at the wording of this statement and the manner accompanying it that involuntarily I looked questioningly at her. Was not the girl her child too? I wondered. There was certainly no resemblance to her, but, for that matter, neither did the son resemble her. There was silence for a moment; then the Secretary said, taking up the picture and looking at it,—

“ Yes, this is Constance, my eldest child, Stephen. She has been in Europe two or three years, but she will come home this winter; we shall want her.”

As he said this he glanced across at Mrs. Childs half interrogatively, but there was no answering look. Then Sandy, by which name the son was called, lounged forward with his hands in his pockets and said,—

“ I just tell you, Mr. Barradale, you ought

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

to see Conny. She's a ripper, a regular ripper ; but she and the old lady here don't hit it off somehow, so Conny stays——'

But Sandy did not finish this extraordinary explanation. The Secretary's hand came down in heavy pressure on his shoulder, there was a play of lightning in his eyes, and the indiscreet disclosure was cut short. The young cub had the grace to flush all over his fair baby face, and I was left to ponder uncomfortably the meaning of it all. There was constrained silence. My natural man's impulse was to praise the beauty of the girl, but something in the face of the woman opposite made me deem it prudent to stay my words of admiration. The family skeleton had been dangled before my eyes, and it took all the tact I possessed to rescue us all from the dangerous ground we were treading upon. Sandy happily diverted our thoughts and tongues by asking about foot-ball as played in this part of the world, and the eagerness with which the discussion of athletic sports was taken up testified to the relief that was felt in a new topic. Sandy's respect for me mounted considerably upon learning that I had been a foot-ball player in my college eleven. A little later the question of the location of the family for the winter came up, and for the first time I perceived that I had not understood the bond I had entered into when I had made my bargain with the Secretary in the beginning. Mrs.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

Childs took possession of the conversation, and said, in her high, penetrating voice,—

“I told Mr. Childs, Mr. Barradale, that he must be sure to look up some one nice who would take charge of things for us here in Washington, and that he could have you all summer, but that I should want you for the winter; and I think, if you will be so kind, you had better begin at once by looking us up a desirable house.”

I was never so surprised in my life. I wondered if I had heard aright. I looked at her, and then across at the Secretary, only to encounter in his eyes a dumb look of appeal. I managed to say, turning to Mrs. Childs,—

“I shall be happy, of course, to serve you in any way that my time will permit, Mrs. Childs; but you know that a private secretary is not his own master, and my duties to the Secretary are to be considered first.”

Thereupon Mrs. Childs turned sharply and said,—

“Didn’t you explain to Mr. Barradale that his real duties as secretary would be to me, Mr. Childs?”

“Well, not exactly that, my dear. I dare say I can spare Stephen to you until we are settled and in running order for the winter, but the truth is I have grown to rely on Stephen, and it will be hard for me to grow accustomed to any one else, even temporarily.”

He looked at me as he spoke, and I felt, as

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

I often had done before, the subtle influence he seemed to possess for me, but nevertheless I did not like the situation, and I determined to make a stand.

"Really, Mrs. Childs, the only duties I am capable of performing are those that I am accustomed to : I shall be of no use, I fear, in the way you mention. I shall be delighted if I can suggest anything, or supplement any arrangement of yours, but—" And I laughed pleasantly without finishing my sentence, as if I had said all there was to say in declining. She answered, persuasively,—

"Oh, come now, Mr. Barradale, you must not say you can be of no use to me ; you are a Washingtonian, you are a society man, and therefore you will be exactly the right man in the right place. Now I want you to come here to-morrow morning and give me your help and advice. I won't enter into anything to-night, but you will be doing a real service to us, to me, to the Secretary, and—" Here she paused an instant ; then she looked up keenly at me and added, artfully, "and to Constance."

She evidently had read in my eyes my admiration for the fair girl in the photograph. She knew the vulnerable spots in a man's make-up, and she played upon this particular one with her not very delicate touch. And I, with all the dishonesty that men invariably use towards women in never facing squarely any

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

I disagreeable question with them, tried to make vague promises, to temporize, to put off Mrs. Childs ; but I might just as well have tried to stem the power of Great Falls. Before I knew it, I had been overborne step by step, till I had consented with what grace I could muster to come to the hotel in the morning and hold conference with the Secretary's wife concerning her *ménage*. But I was inwardly sulky at the prospect. I did not stay long after that. I soon found myself out in the dark streets again. The Secretary followed me, and, putting his arm through mine, walked along with me and said,—

“I will go up as far as the club with you. I want to explain one or two things to you.”

His quick, springing step was more full of energy and life than mine, and I had to quicken my own more languid gait to keep up with him. But his speech was slow, and the explanation was long in coming. At last he said, abruptly,—

“Stephen, Mrs. Childs is my second wife. Constance is my daughter, but not hers. Constance and Sandy are only half-brother and sister. Constance's mother——” and there was a pause which to me seemed significant. In a few minutes he continued quietly,—

“Constance's mother shared all my early struggles when I was only a sort of hired man, or at best only working on shares on a rough Western farm. She died before I ever attained

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

anything, or before I knew it was in me to attain anything. She never knew any but the hard, unlovely beginning to my career. Afterwards I married again. The present Mrs. Childs has been a great factor in my later life. She has ability and ambition, and a wonderful faculty for gaining an end. She has done much to put me where I am. I should like, Stephen, to have you meet her wishes and plans as nearly as you can ; you will be serving me as truly in so doing as you are serving me now, and it will be at most only a temporary thing."

He paused and faced me. We had now traversed the length of the street between the hotel and the club, and stood in the electric light from the vestibule. He was regarding me intently, half wistfully, half commandingly. I did not like the idea of serving Mrs. Childs even temporarily, but I found myself saying heartily,—

"Don't say another word, sir ; I will do as you desire. I will serve you now and always to the best of my ability and in whatever way you may designate."

I put out my hand in token of the compact. He shook it warmly and seemed loath to part. I noticed it, and said,—

"Come in and play pool, sir ; you have scarcely been in the club since your election to it."

"Not to-night, my boy," he replied.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

He turned suddenly and was swallowed up in the utter darkness of the street. The lazy jog of a passing car as it turned the street corner, the backing up of a herdic cab at the curbstone, and his retreating footsteps, were the only sights and sounds in the still September night.

I stood on the threshold, thinking over the events of the evening and the promises I had made for the morrow, which, if my instinct did not fail me, would bind me for most of the morrows that should dawn during the coming season. I was wondering what would be the outcome of my odd relations to these newcomers, and was getting some jeering amusement out of it at my own expense, when Hargate of the British Embassy, with his monocle screwed into his eye, came rushing headlong up the steps, bent nearly double, which is his manner of carrying himself, and which, by the way, seems to be the preferred manner of walking of many of the foreigners. He dragged me inside with him to make up a game, but we had not got much beyond the swing doors when we encountered Roger Macon.

Macon is to my mind one of the handsomest men I have ever seen. He is a Virginian, and, speaking of club types, Westmoreland is written all over him. He is only a non-resident member with us, and I had not known that he was in town. He came towards us rapidly, I thought almost violently, and when

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

we were face to face I saw that he looked haggard and pale. I dropped apart from Hargate to speak to him.

"Why, Macon, old man, what's up? You don't look very fit."

"I've been hunting all over the place for you, Barradale. Can you give me a few minutes' time?"

"Of course," I replied. I excused myself from Hargate and led the way into the loggia. Macon followed me. We took possession of the most remote table and ordered drinks. For a short space of time he did not speak, but regarded me gloomily; then he asked me abruptly,—

"Do you know Mrs. Romney?"

I felt the muscles around my mouth tighten suddenly, and involuntarily I closed my hand, but I kept my eyes on Macon. What was he going to rake up? I wondered. I replied, without hesitation,—

"Yes, I know Mrs. Romney."

"But you know her very well, do you not?" He watched me narrowly. I knocked off the ash of my cigar slowly, and answered,—

"Yes, I know Mrs. Romney fairly well."

"Barradale, is it true that Mrs. Romney has a husband living?"

"Yes, it is true." I replied, briefly; then I added, after a moment, "Any one else could have told you as much, Macon."

Macon's hands shut spasmodically. His

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

lips were compressed. Finally he demanded, fiercely,—

“Why should Romney’s existence have been kept dark? Tell me all you know of him.”

“Why do you come to me and take this tone? What has happened?” I asked, thoroughly nettled. Then I went on after a moment: “There is little to tell about Mrs. Romney. She is young, pretty, and gay. She is in society, and she is living apart from her husband. I have understood that Romney was an impossible sort of man as a husband. When I first knew Mrs. Romney I had supposed her to be a widow, until I learned unexpectedly and unpleasantly that she wasn’t.”

“Then you were one of her victims?” he queried, with a sneer. I merely shrugged my shoulders. His face grew dark. He leaned towards me, and said, significantly,—

“I am told, Barradale, that you are Mrs. Romney’s friend.”

I felt the blood mount to my face. The insinuation was not to be borne. I sprang to my feet in hot anger. “See here, Macon, your tone and manner are little short of offensive. What do you mean?”

Macon rose to his feet at the same time, and we faced each other. Of course such an abrupt movement attracted attention, and our menacing attitude towards each other brought two men in the opposite corner to their feet.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

There was an ominous pause. Suddenly Macon's tense manner relaxed, the sneer died out of his face, and was succeeded by the most haggard misery I have ever seen in a man's eyes. He dropped back into his chair quietly, and said,—

“I beg pardon, Barradale; I do not want to pick a quarrel. Sit down again; I want to ask a question, and I want you to answer it honestly, as between man and man.”

I sat down again, of course. He leaned across the table earnestly, and, lowering his voice, said,—

“I have just heard your name coupled with hers, and I have also just heard for the first time that Romney is living. Well, Barradale, there's no need to explain further. I am the most miserable man on God's earth.”

His eyes were indeed miserable. I could not but pity him, for I understood the situation only too well. He went on :

“I have come to you to know the truth, and I am going to ask for it plainly. Is there an affair between Mrs. Romney and you?”

“None, absolutely,” I curtly and emphatically replied.

Macon drew a long breath. There was a pause. I was on the point of giving him the unvarnished truth about Mrs. Romney, but I hesitated. He was too wretched and too fierce just then to have been grateful to me if I had ; and, besides, he was finding it out for himself.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

Afterwards I was sorry I had not spoken, for I was destined to hear more of the affair in the near future.

The whole scene had been so sudden, so brief, and so deucedly uncomfortable that when Macon left the club, which he did almost immediately, I did not learn anything about his movements or intentions, save that he was leaving town that night.

After he had gone I went and hunted up Hargate and the game. I plunged into it, and was glad to forget my interview with Macon in the loggia.





CHAPTER IV.

TOLD BY STEPHEN.

IF I were to go into all the details of the succeeding days, of my conferences with Mrs. Childs and of my interviews with real estate men in the endeavor to locate the Secretary's family for the coming season, I should become as tiresome as a certain popular novelist did who in countless pages portrayed the dreary wanderings of two of his favorite characters in their search of a flat. During these days I often ground my teeth over the task I had undertaken.

It is needless to say that I soon learned that Mrs. Childs felt the importance of money and position, and that she meant to make the most of them in the brief four years before her. I felt a kind of relief and satisfaction in this fact, for it would be a much more popular thing to overdo the position than to fall short in public expectation, and I had a vivid recollection of a predecessor of hers some years ago who per-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

sisted in driving about in the department wagon, to the utter scandalizing of the community, and who, when remonstrated with for so extraordinary a proceeding, had tersely disclaimed, in a vernacular entirely her own, there being any "sculduggery" about her, whatever that might mean. So, when Mrs. Childs wished to lease a showy white stone house with monstrous caryatids supporting the eaves and impossible lions guarding the door-way, I felt that her error in taste was at least encouraging, and that it would be a more hopeful task to tone her down to a quieter selection than it would have been to key her to a higher pitch had her choice fallen below the requirements of the situation. But we had some discouraging and annoying skirmishes before anything was accomplished. It seemed as if there were nothing in all the town that pleased her ladyship save the aforesaid white monstrosity, but against that I had set my face, and I was supported by the Secretary. At last I had an inspiration, and I flattered myself that I had been quite adroit when I finally installed the family in a spacious old-fashioned house, in which all the appointments bore the hallmark of gentility and race.

It was a house that had been known to me from my earliest recollection. Familiar figures trooped through every room. I could still see a stately man of the old school moving about, and I almost felt again his awe-inspiring man-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

ner. What would his feelings have been had he known that the old family mansion would pass entirely out of the hands of his descendants, and that his own grandson would one day be installing strangers therein ? Of course the Childs knew nothing of this. They did not know to whom the old house had once belonged. They did not know what ghosts peopled it to me. I should keep the knowledge to myself, and I hoped no idle tongue would inform them.

When everything was done that I could do, when the corps of servants was complete, when horses and correct carriages were in the stable and the last touches were given, these new people, whose lackey I had become, moved into my grandfather's house. I could not help awaiting with some curiosity their comments. Sandy said, as he tore all over the house, his footsteps sounding like a cavalry charge,—

“What a jolly old house this is ! I say, governor, I can see all the way down the river from the cupola.”

Mrs. Childs looked about regretfully, and said, in a quick, complaining tone,—

“Dear me, what a barn of a house ! People don't know half how to live down South here. I wish the drawing-room had been done over in white and gold. The crystal chandelier isn't bad, though it is clumsy and old-fashioned, but of course the rooms will look very different when I fill in a few modern chairs in bright

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

satin, and some bits of new *bric-à-brac*. The stuff in that cabinet over there must have come out of the Ark, and the ball-room is perfectly hideous. I can't for the life of me see why any one should want those queer mirrors between all the windows, and those long spindleg-legged chairs—or are they sofas? They are simply terrible. I shall move them all out the first thing I do."

I half sighed and half smiled at the fate in store for the old Chippendale and the quaint Venetian mirrors which had been brought from Italy and had been one of the wonders of the town in a long-gone-by day, and which would be regarded almost as a patent of nobility by most people; but I knew that Mrs. Childs was still regretting the white stone mansion with the lions and caryatids.

As for the Secretary, he walked silently about with his hands clasped behind him. He looked long and thoughtfully out of the little round windows at the top of the house, from which could be seen a wide, sluggish river, bounded in the distance by the soft, green banks of the Virginia shore, against which in relief stood out an old yellow mansion-house, grim, lonely, and historic. As he turned away from the view he sighed and said,—

"It was a terrible struggle, Stephen, and it is painful even now to look at that old place and remember all that Robert Lee gave up. Let me see, some of your own people were

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

on the other side in the Rebellion, weren't they?"

"Yes, my grandfather was entirely rebel in his sympathies, so much so that a guard was kept around this—around his house for months. My father's oldest brother fought and died for the lost cause, my father himself being the only one of his family whose allegiance to the government never wavered. He was given command of a ship at a very early age, and there was a terrible and bitter breach between him and my grandfather. All this is hearsay with me, for I was too little a chap to know of such things at that time, having been ushered into the world with the guns of Sumter."

"This old house pleases me exactly, Stephen. The man who built it and lived in it was evidently no self-made man. He must have come of an old line that had known only the cultured side of life. Look at these queer bits of carving: they must have been brought from Europe. Constance will like this. She and I are a good deal alike in our tastes. Do you know anything about the former owners?"

"Only that their story is common enough in this part of the world. They were ruined by the war. When the last owner died, about twelve years ago, he had nothing to bequeath but debts and a pension to his widow." (God forgive me, I was speaking of my own father.) "This old house was covered up with mortgages, and of course it passed away from the

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

original family, together with everything in it. I happened to know it could be leased, and I am glad that it is satisfactory."

"That scroll-work over there almost forms a letter : it looks like B," said the Secretary.

Luckily, he was speaking absently, and I did not reply. I felt a singular reluctance to acknowledge my relationship to the old place, and I wished with all my heart that I had encouraged Mrs. Childs to lease the white monstrosity upon which her heart had been set in the first place ; but it was too late. I had of my own free will precipitated these people almost headlong into this particular house, and I was just beginning to count the cost of what I had done. My feelings can better be imagined than described when I remembered that I should have to face the entire smart world in the character of major-domo to these people in my own grandfather's house. The situation was rare, and caused me some exquisite, though grim, amusement.

Sometimes it seemed more herculean than my temper and self-respect could bear ; for, when all was said and done, what did I know about the running of an official household ? or, for that matter, what did I know about running a household of any kind ? and I was called upon for every petty thing imaginable. Mrs. Childs would make a great show of consulting me upon all points, and then, woman-like, go and do just as she had made up her

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

mind to do. I did, however, dissuade her from using a crest upon the panels of her carriages,—which took some little tact to accomplish, for she had just received a very impressive-looking one with martlets upon it from a well-known firm in New York; I also saved the Chippendale and Venetian mirrors from banishment. It was *Figaro ci, Figaro là*, every day in the week, except when I would take refuge with the Secretary and write up for him his arrears of correspondence.

I had not heard anything further of Roger Macon, but I learned that Mrs. Romney had returned to town from a coaching-trip, and then I heard through the constantly-sifting gossip of the club that Macon had met Mrs. Romney on this coaching-trip and had at once become infatuated with her. He had followed her from place to place, and even to Washington, where he had immediately learned that there was a stumbling-block in the shape of Romney, and, as he had thought, still another in the shape of myself. I could not help wishing that I had spoken out frankly at the club, as my impulse had dictated. What an egregious fool a man can be about a woman when given the inclination and an unhindered opportunity!

The autumn was now well advanced. People were beginning to flock back to town. Houses were being opened up in all directions. The same old set began to take their familiar

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

places in public once more. The Bachelors reorganized, and we had our usual yearly wrangle over the list of admissions. The more conservative members, with their ever-vigilant eyes, scanned the membership list carefully lest some taint of trade should creep within our hallowed midst; though of course we were ready to stretch out our arms in welcome to any unchallenged sprig from the embassies who might perchance have arrived on this side during the summer. The Hunt Club also woke again to new life and elected a new M.F.H. A date was set for the first run, and it was devoutly hoped that traditional hunting weather would prevail, with a southerly wind and a cloudy sky. The meet was to be this side of Dumblane and the finish to be at the new club-house, where the hunters and the visitors who should go to see the throw-off were to stop for tea afterwards.

The one lasting enthusiasm I have ever had, and the only one that has ever seemed worth while, has been my love of horses. If I were to tell of the sacrifices, the shifts I have made to keep my mare Stéphane from following in the wake of my other possessions, I should make the eyes of my polite friends open rather wide. Stéphane has been my one lasting passion. She has never failed me, and I made up my mind long ago that when the time should come that I could no longer provide for her I should lead her out into the free

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

and open country and there end it all with a bullet between her faithful eyes. I think she has always understood this in her dumb brute way ; for sometimes when I have been unusually down and have ridden gloomily out into the country away from asphalt pavements, she has turned her grave, almost human eyes upon me as much as to say, "Don't do it to-day, master."

She has carried me a winner through several steeple-chases ; she has followed the longest hunts, always close to the hounds and rarely absent at the death ; water jumps, worm fences, prickly hedges, are as nothing to her quick, unerring eye, her supple sinews. It is only a heavily ploughed field that can have power to stay her stride. No one will ever know the respect I have for Stéphane. She is the only one of her sex that is never capricious, never changeable ; and the red-brown gloss of her head is as beautiful as ever the red-brown tresses of a woman could be. During the scorching hot months of summer she had been browsing in green country pastures with her shoes off, but with the early awakening autumn sports she had been brought to town and shod and was ready for the first run of the hounds.

I persuaded the Secretary and Mrs. Childs to drive out to the meet and afterwards to come to the club-house for tea, where I should meet them and act as host. I knew it would be a

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

good opportunity to present to them thus early a few of the right people among those who were entirely outside of official circles. Accordingly, they drove out in their new cabriolet, and when the run was over I dismounted and approached their carriage to beg them to come inside the club-house for tea. As I went towards them I was secretly amused at the interrogative glances from both coachman and footman which plainly asked of me, "Are we all right? Are we doing the thing properly?" I was, however, a little staggered by the cool nod which Mrs. Childs bestowed upon me, and hastened to present to her the two most important personages present, the French ambassador and the Honorable Arthur Alan Butler Hargate. Not that I presented the latter with all the flourish of his many names, but I was a little bit nettled at the condescending nod I had received, and therefore gave Hargate rather more of a send-off than I usually bestow on him. But if I was impressed with the coolness of Madam's greeting to me, judge how much more I was impressed when she addressed the French ambassador in French,—crude and clumsy French, if you will, but nevertheless French. As for the Secretary himself, he was undisguisedly pleased by the whole scene and surroundings,—the sharp, damp air, the stretch of open country, the mounted horsemen, the impatient, drooping hounds, the quick-moving figures of the gay

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

throng, all thrown into relief by the dark line of woods in the background and the warm, old-fashioned farm-house in the foreground. I knew the Secretary was pleased and interested. I also saw that he had an eye for a horse, for he took in Stéphane's points at once and said,—

“I didn't know you owned such a piece of horse-flesh, Stephen?”

“It is my one folly, sir.”

Just then a general move was made towards the club-house, and I ushered the Secretary and Mrs. Childs into the primitive little drawing-room, with its low ceiling, its old-time furniture, and its faint, musty smell. As my eye swept over the room I was rather taken aback to find that Mrs. Romney was pouring tea at the tea-table; but before I had time to make any recognition of the fact my attention was distracted by the sound of my own name, and I heard just behind me in a loud voice, that evidently took no heed of the surrounding crowd,—

“Stephen Barradale can work it for us, if he only will; he's here with 'em to-day.”

I knew the voice well. Its owner belonged to the smart set, and was a young woman whose tongue was a good deal longer than her pedigree. I turned at once to find myself face to face with a group of fashionable girls,—girls with unimpeachable frocks, unimpeachable appearance, sleek and well groomed. They

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

were perfect types of the smart set that belongs to all society the world over in this end-of-the-century, electric-light age. Their creed is to waste no courtesy on anybody outside of their own immediate set, or on any one who cannot give them something in return. But I don't know that I ought to rail at the fashionable girl of the day. Providence, no doubt, was wise in fashioning her as he did ; for, in the language of Mrs. Poyser, he undoubtedly made her to match the man. I don't know that her manners ever grated upon me before,—probably not,—but they grated upon me that day.

I wheeled around upon hearing my name spoken, and faced the speaker, who was Miss Bellamy. She continued,—

“We were just saying, Mr. Barradale, that we think it might be a good thing to cultivate Mrs. Childs. We hear that these people have loads of money and that they're going to entertain lavishly. We want to get hold of as many ball-rooms as we can for our dinner dances, and we know the fame of the Barradale ball-room. Do you think you could work the ball-room for us ?”

“I am sure I could not,” I replied, smilingly and promptly, “but I will present you, and no doubt you can arrange it for yourselves.” And accordingly I presented them.

It amused me not a little to note the adroit flattery which each let drop, and which was a comedy in itself. I do not think that it was

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

entirely lost upon Mrs. Childs ; and I mentally tossed up a coin, wondering whether it would come down heads or tails,—or, in other words, whether it would be "ball-room" or "no ball-room" for these disinterested girls.

When everybody had had tea and there seemed no possible excuse for lingering, there was a general move towards carriages. The crowd moved out upon the cramped porch, where it overflowed in a straggling group. While we stood there just before separating, a soft, sweet voice called me distinctly enough for everybody at hand to hear, "Stephen." It was Mrs. Romney's.

Once I should have thrilled from head to foot at the sound of my name so pronounced, and my voice would have been too unsteady to answer ; but now I only turned gravely towards her. She continued, plaintively,—

"Stephen, am I to be the only one who is not to meet your friends ?"

There was a sweet, hurt, child-like look in her innocent, grave eyes. It seemed to me that every tongue had suddenly ceased its chatter. There was a perceptible pause. I said, quietly, while I stood with bared head,—

"Mr. Secretary, may I present Mrs. Romney ?"

The Secretary uncovered his gray head with old-fashioned gallantry and made a neatly-turned compliment. Then I pronounced Mrs. Romney's name to Mrs. Childs, and we stood

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

in light conversation for a few moments. Hargate finally motioned to the Secretary's footman to bring up their carriage, and while they were preparing to drive away I sprang into my saddle, and Stéphane and I turned our faces towards the town.





CHAPTER V.

TOLD BY STEPHEN.

WITH the first Monday in December came the assembling of Congress. This event is taken very little into account by the general run of people in the District, and by the smart set not at all. I can count various people of my acquaintance who have never in all their lives had the impulse to cross the threshold of either the Senate or the House. It was therefore some little surprise to me to learn that Mrs. Childs desired to be present on the occasion, and it was intimated to me that I was expected to accompany her in order to point out the prominent men. To me there is scarcely any form of boredom equal to that of Congress. The overheated air, the uncomfortable gallery seats, the din and confusion of sounds, and the tedious and perpetual calling of yeas and nays, go to make up the most monotonous experience to the initiated that can well be found.

Of course, on the assembling of a new Congress all interest centres in the House, and it was accordingly there that I piloted Mrs.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

Childs. As we made our way thither rather slowly through the corridors it was almost a liberal education to see the crowd. The lobbies, committee-rooms, corridors, and doorways swarmed thickly with all sorts and conditions of men and women who wanted everything under the sun and were there to get it : men who wanted consulates in South America, men who wanted Indian Agencies, speculators who wanted mail-lettings for routes in the Territories, seedy men who were dependants of Senators and Congressmen, men who wanted to reduce the tax on whiskey, men who had schemes for the tariff, men who had just invented or discovered new projectiles, men on the make and men on the spend, unprotected women, widows who had never had husbands, women with antecedents and histories, women with careers, women with missions, and women who were nameless.

There were crowds who bought the Blue-Book, crowds who borrowed it, and multitudes who devoured it eagerly. They were mostly the odds and ends of the human family, set afloat or run aground by the pressure of hard living and hard times. They, one and all, trooped through the endless corridors and flooded the galleries, there to gaze down unintelligently upon the chaos of the House below.

When we finally reached the galleries, it was on the stroke of twelve, and we were

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

ushered into the gallery set apart for diplomats. We had scarcely seated ourselves when the gavel fell, and the clerk of the House, there being no Speaker as yet, called the new Congress to order, then immediately the din began.

I set about my task of pointing out the well-known faces of the members below. Who at a glance cannot tell the new member just entering upon his term? He is smiling, confident, suave, and important. The old member, alas! has often a weary look on his face: he knows that he must settle down to the old work of baffling unsolved problems, and must face new questions which threateningly confront him. He is not the brilliant meteor who flashes through a session or two leaving a trail of light behind, but he is the plodding member, who faithfully serves his constituents and his party, who never shirks the work of the House, who never shirks his vote, but, alas! who is nine times out of ten not known outside the Congressional Directory and the Record. Ah, who would be a Congressman? Not I. I was almost content for the moment with being a lackey to the rich woman at my side, who was plying me with questions continually:

"What's that man doing over there with his hat on? What is the clerk mumbling? Will every one of 'em have to take the oath? You say that man is the sergeant-at-arms: what does he have to do? Carry the mace? What is the mace?" and so on.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

I found it almost as difficult to answer all these questions comprehensively as it would have been to make her understand the points in a game of baseball ; and whoever has tried to make a woman understand baseball has been tested to the uttermost.

At last Mrs. Childs became weary of the constant repetition and swearing in of the new members, and concluded to go home. I solaced myself later with a short, brisk ride into the country. Stéphane was fresh, so was the December air ; and I got back to partake of club salt in a more contented spirit. That night after I had written for the Secretary for a couple of hours he suddenly interrupted the work with an unexpected proposition :

"Stephen, we're very lonely in this big house : I want you to come here and live with us permanently."

"Never, sir," I said, promptly and decisively.

"Why not ? We were talking of it only this morning. Mrs. Childs desires it, Sandy is full of the notion, and I—I want it very much."

"Never, sir," was all I seemed able to repeat. I had visions of Mrs. Childs coming in and settling the thing before I could make it understood that I would not consent to any such arrangement.

"But, my dear boy, you have no home ; you have only the club, and you are invaluable to me. What is your objection ?"

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"Simply, sir, that I have an utter disinclination for it. I cannot but feel gratified by the kind invitation, but I have been used to absolute freedom. It would be difficult to conform to new ways, and I think it would be a mistake all around."

The idea of living in the old house again under such a different rule would have been intolerable to me in itself, to say nothing of the parting with my last remnant of freedom and self-respect. The Secretary said, with a sigh,—

"I am sorry; I had set my heart upon it. You will find it more difficult to refuse Mrs. Childs, Stephen."

"I know I shall; but it is impossible for me to accept the proposition."

Nothing more was said at the time, but in a day or two I had to meet the question with Mrs. Childs. It was couched in a very different way. She demanded of me that I should live under their roof, and one argument was,—

"You see, Mr. Barradale, it is a great nuisance to be sending to the club for you when you are not here. You never go away from the house for an hour but something is wanted, some note to answer, some subscription to be filled in, or some one to be interviewed, and I don't see any other way but that you must live here permanently."

"Never," was all I could reply; and so stubborn was I that at last Mrs. Childs said, sharply,—

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"There must be some reason that does not meet the eye. Have you considered how much to your advantage financially it will be?"

I flushed, and said, "No, I have not, Mrs. Childs, and I can only repeat that it is out of the question. I would do almost anything for the Secretary and—you, but not that."

"Well, I think you are very obstinate, Mr. Barradale." And she set her mouth in the straight line I already knew so well.

Shortly after this the smart world began to wake up, and informal visiting became the order of the day. It was now part of my duty, or I may say my whole duty, to make out visiting-lists and to keep Mrs. Childs's visiting-book. Almost every name that I entered in the latter brought a twitch to my lips. Every set of cards that I put in envelopes and sent out to be delivered by the footman caused in me a feeling of exquisite derision. Then, too, I had the novel mission of finding out the dates of the different Cabinet dinners that were to take place; for it was *de rigueur* that they should not conflict with each other, and above all it was of great importance not to conflict with the State dinners at the Executive Mansion. All this I finally arranged, and the dates for the dinners of Secretary and Mrs. Childs were duly set, beginning with the first one to the President; and other and far more brilliant schemes were talked over. As New Year's day drew on, which begins with the White House

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

and the Diplomatic breakfast, I felt that the curtain was about to be rung up.

Towards the end of December, just before Christmas, a cablegram was received which threw the old Barradale mansion into quite an excitement. It announced that Constance Childs would sail for home immediately. It needed only a glance into the Secretary's face to see what this news was to him. I did not look at Mrs. Childs ; I did not wish to surprise in her any reluctance to welcome the daughter of the house ; and from the silence which for a moment prevailed, I knew that the news was unwelcome to her. Sandy sent up a shout of pleasure, and said, with boyish enthusiasm,—

“I say, governor, it'll be jolly good fun for you and me to have Con home again. I'm going to New York to meet her.”

“Yes, you shall go, Sandy, my son ; we'll go together.”

The father and son left the room arm in arm. Some days later, when the steamer was nearly due, the Secretary came home early one day, and came straight to the library where I was writing, and said,—

“Stephen, I find that the very day the steamer arrives will be Cabinet day : this new foreign complication has arisen which compels a full discussion, and the President has requested everybody to be present. I don't see how I can possibly go to New York, and yet I don't see how I can let Constance arrive and

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

I not be there to meet her. What shall I do?"

There was a worn, harassed look on his face. I had noticed for some time past that the cares of the department were weighing him down, and that he was having less and less leisure every day.

"Well, Mr. Secretary, could not Mrs. Childs go, accompanied by Sandy?"

"Yes," he replied, doubtfully; then he added, "My idea was that you should go over with Sandy."

"Of course, sir, I will go, if you desire, and if you find that you cannot get away. When does the steamer get in?"

"Day after to-morrow, and you must go over to-morrow night. I wouldn't have had it happen this way for the world; the poor child will think she is not welcome, for she has no one but me to look to."

After a little more discussion, the Secretary returned to the department. The next afternoon a message came to me from him that he was definitely sure he could not get away, and I was instructed to proceed with Sandy immediately to New York. Accordingly, the boy, in high glee, and I not altogether unwilling, started off in the Congressional that afternoon. Sandy remarked as we sped along,—

"It would be a go if I shouldn't know Con."

"How long is it since your sister went abroad?"

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"It is nearly three years, and I'll be hanged if I knew that last photo she sent home. Of course you never saw Con in your life, and if I shouldn't know her we'd be in a hole. I wish the governor had come."

"Oh, we shall have no difficulty, I imagine : she at least will know you, Sandy."

"Well, I'm not so sure of that," replied the youngster, in an important tone, as he put up his hand slyly to stroke an incipient down on his upper lip.

The next day we stood on the pier and watched the incoming ship, and when she touched the dock we pressed forward to scan the faces leaning over the rail. I was looking for the fair girl I had seen in the photograph, and Sandy was staring with all his might for dimly-remembered features. Slowly the crowd surged over the gang-plank, and everybody was closely scrutinized, but there seemed to be nobody for us to claim. I was beginning to be seriously uneasy as in due time the last group came ashore, when a voice exclaimed suddenly from behind us, "Why, Sandy!"

A tall young woman, very nearly as tall as I, and not looking in the least like the photograph I so well remembered, was just detaching herself from a group of distinguished-looking people with whom undoubtedly she had made the voyage. As we turned around quickly upon Sandy's name being spoken, we faced her. There was a moment of uncer-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

tainty on Sandy's part, then his arms were flung around her in a quick, boyish embrace, and he exclaimed,—

"Why, Conny, old girl, I didn't know you ; and I've been staring at every woman under forty that came down the gang-plank. I don't know how I came to miss you."

"Where is papa ? I don't see him," she said at once, glancing anxiously about.

"He couldn't come over, Con. His chief went and had an old Cabinet meeting, so the governor couldn't come. Barradale came instead."

There was a trembling about the girl's mouth, and for a moment her eyes filled, as she stood gazing wistfully into Sandy's face ; then she asked, negatively,—

"I suppose of course mamma did not come to meet me either?"

"No, Con ; fact is, the old lady is in the midst of great doings and is no end of a swell just now ; she couldn't leave, but she sent her love."

"I think papa might have come ; I counted on seeing his face the first thing," said the girl. And she turned her face away to hide the disappointed tears. I had been quite forgotten by Sandy, and stood aside, an onlooker ; but I remembered that there were custom-house officers to meet and luggage to be inspected, so I stepped forward and said,—

"Miss Childs, the Secretary gave me this

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

letter to give to you as soon as you landed, and if you will give me your keys I will attend to the custom-house and to the transferring of your luggage."

Miss Childs looked at me, while I spoke, half doubtfully, half inquiringly ; then Sandy bethought himself to say,—

" Oh, I forgot, Conny ; this is Mr. Barradale. He is the right-hand man in the family nowadays, and my particular friend. He's the governor's private secretary, though the mater has rather swiped him of late."

Miss Childs gave me a troubled look and murmured something about having " heard of Mr. Barradale" in acknowledgment of Sandy's horribly slangy and patronizing introduction. She was very much overcome at the defection of her father, and she had not had a chance to read what I was sure was a tender greeting from him. She mechanically handed me out her keys, giving me a faint smile.

I found a place for her away from the crowd, and, bidding Sandy stand guard over her, made my way to the custom office. There was no difficulty nor delay, fortunately ; we were able inside of an hour or so to leave the pier, and were soon rattling over the cobblestones on our way to the train.

I had had considerable curiosity about this young woman, and while she and Sandy were deep in their eager conversation I was silently studying her. I was distinctly disappointed in

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

her beauty, and she had, besides, a most pronounced affectation of speech. It was ultra precise, ultra refined, ultra cultivated. She seemed on a first view a perfect type of the *fin-de-siècle* young woman. She paid absolutely no attention to me beyond what conventional courtesy demanded, and I was left to observe her at my leisure. There was no doubt about it, I was disappointed in Constance Childs.





CHAPTER VI.

TOLD BY STEPHEN.

MY disappointment in Miss Childs's beauty lasted just three days. At the end of that time I found myself seeing her with very different eyes. Whether it was that she underwent some subtle change upon reaching home, or whether her points were so fine that one could discover them only slowly, I do not know. She had an unusually grave face for a young woman. Her hair was brown, rather nondescript in its color, neither warm nor yet dull in tint. She parted it plainly and drew it away softly on either side of her temples, leaving a forehead that was like the opaque whiteness of an egg-shell. She had not one regular feature. When examined separately, they were distinctly plain features, for the nose was rather too short and the mouth a trifle too wide; but there was a wealth of rich vivid coloring upon her cheeks that was the living embodiment of fresh, young health. The eyes were large, dark, and expressive, and were marked with straight, delicate brows; they met

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS .

you with a steady level look which could change in an instant with any interest or emotion. When she bent them upon Sandy there was suppressed laughter in them at his audacious slang, or they glowed with interest in his games and sports. If they were turned towards Mrs. Childs there came into their depths a serious, contemplative look, which gradually became wistful. When they rested upon the Secretary, as they invariably did if he were present, they were soft and luminous and would gradually deepen with thoughtful comprehension as she followed his utterances, no matter how intricate or dense the subject ; and if by chance her eyes dropped upon me—well, there was simply no expression at all ; not any more, that is, than when they rested upon the butler or the footman.

There was something intensely vigorous and fresh about her, albeit she did speak with a certain affectation. It was a tone and inflection that one often hears nowadays among young women who are well educated, who have travelled overmuch, and who are perhaps conscious of it. It did not take Sandy long to catch up this little affectation of speech, which he imitated and aired upon all occasions.

The mother and daughter seemed to be upon fairly good terms outwardly ; just how much of an armed neutrality it was I could only imagine. Sharp words and small stings were met with quiet manner, dignified speech,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

or else silence. Mrs. Childs, while in no way ever disposed to derogate any jot from her position, nevertheless put the daughter forward prominently, and from the time of Miss Childs's first appearance in public there was a change of venue in the entire fashionable world. The striking-looking, well-dressed, self-poised girl attracted wide-spread attention, and the wealth that was behind her brought young and old among the smart set to the Secretary's doors. I was an interested and amused observer.

I had begun already to hear little sneers dropped now and then upon my position in the Childs household, and I was ready to curse the day I had entered upon such a farce. I had caught one or two glances from Miss Childs as she noted my footing. There was surprise, then perplexity, and finally a look which, if I spoke the truth, I should call contempt.

The first time that my position was clearly defined to the polite world at large was on the first Cabinet-day reception, when I stood near Mrs. Childs and made the presentations to her of the Toms, Dicks, and Harrys who thronged in through her doors all that afternoon. I had, in years gone by, half pitied the young army and navy officers whom I had seen detailed to make presentations to the wives of the War and Navy Secretaries, but I little dreamed it would be my fate to do likewise.

As I stood there that afternoon and several

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

people, both men and women, of my acquaintance chaffed me slyly upon my occupation, I caught a fleeting glance from Miss Childs as she heard these little gibes ; but I went on presenting name after name with the utmost coolness and nonchalance. No one should know what a fiery ordeal it was to me. Once Mrs. Childs whispered to me, in a surprised tone,—

“ Where do all these odd-looking people come from ? Are they representative Washingtonians ? Do they flock like this every Wednesday ? ”

“ Yes,” I replied, and my eye followed a group of impossible women who had just come in to walk about the rooms, take stock of things, stare at the receiving party, and walk out again. Then I continued, in explanation,—

“ Most of these people are strangers ; some of them are Washingtonians, but very few of the smart set are here. They do not do very much of this kind of visiting, though no doubt some of them will be here to-day. The diplomats will present themselves sooner or later.”

Before the day was over, various of the diplomatic corps came in. Hargate was particularly anxious to meet Miss Childs, and after presentation lingered until nearly the close of the afternoon. There was an *attaché* of the French Embassy, Bouton by name, who also seemed to become enamoured at first sight.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

I never had a particle of liking for Bouton, and I hoped devoutly that he did not mean to attach himself to the family.

The ease with which Miss Childs met and talked to the various foreigners made me think that she felt more at home with them than with her compatriots. She always seemed to have a fluent word of German or Italian, and French of course. I almost expected to hear Chinese fall from her lips when the representative of China came in with a jade ring on his thumb and a big jewelled button in his cap ; but no, she addressed him in French, and, finding that fail, she conversed with the interpreter, Dr. Ping, who conveyed her remarks to the impassive Celestial. The crowning event of the day was when Mrs. Romney swept into the room, followed closely by Roger Macon. I had not known that he was in town, but as soon as I saw his determined, almost dogged face I knew there was sure to be some *dénouement* sooner or later, and that he meant to see this affair to the bitter end. Mrs. Romney looked as young, fair, and innocent as any dove. Her first remark was loud enough for any one to hear who stood near, and her tone was as gracious and liquid as the purest spring water.

"I am so glad to see you, Stephen. It must be delightful to you to be in your grandfather's house again. The old Barradale domain looks vastly rejuvenated."

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

As she made this remark she looked up innocently into my face, but she was careful at the same time to notice whether Miss Childs had heard her. Of course Miss Childs had, and was looking at us both questioningly. Mrs. Romney thereupon addressed herself to her, and said, opening her eyes to their widest extent, like a child,—

“Why, Miss Childs, I thought everybody in Washington knew that this house belonged to the Barradales. Stephen was born here. It is such a strange coincidence, his being here again; everybody is talking about it, and I supposed you knew it.”

“No, I did not know it, Mrs. Romney; I have only been home a week or two, and have not become acquainted with nor interested in the personal histories of people as yet,” replied Miss Childs; and she turned her eyes upon me swiftly with a look I do not like to recall, nor shall I define its meaning; but its effect was shrivelling, and I felt the blood leap in me. I answered her look in speech, and was rude in intention. I looked her squarely in the eyes, and said, smiling,—

“It has been one of Fortune’s turns of the wheel, Miss Childs: I am unfortunately the end of an old line, and you are happily the beginning of a new one, that is all.”

I had not bettered my position one whit by my remark, but something in this young woman’s attitude of disdain towards me and her world-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

liness stung me continually, and I was compelled by her manner to be constantly on the defensive, and to give more thought to her than I had given to any woman since my affair with Mrs. Romney. One afternoon a little later she entirely overstepped the bounds in showing her contempt for me. A party of us was assembled in the Secretary's drawing-room, and some idiot was attempting to run me upon my nearness to Miss Childs and all the possibilities it opened up. Miss Childs of course heard it, and, as if to define my position clearly before every one, said, in a tone of curt command,—

“Mr. Barradale, I am waiting for tea. Go and find out what is the matter.”

Her words cut like a lash, and I was angered by her rudeness; but, without betraying any concern or even surprise, I touched an electric bell and summoned the footman. When he appeared I said, quietly,—

“Miss Childs has an order to give, I believe.”

I turned away and speedily left the room amidst an intense silence, but I had caught a burning flush on her face as soon as I addressed the footman. I wondered if she were trying to enact the scene from the “Poor Young Man,” and I had to smile as I recalled how exactly we had filled the bill. I avoided her as much as was possible thenceforth.

From this time on the social ball rolled rapidly. The Childs became the most brilliant

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

entertainers in all the town : dinners, receptions, musicales, followed in rapid succession. Miss Childs was already having a decided vogue, and there were various men in her train. Hargate was becoming assiduous in his attentions, always managing to be near her whenever she appeared. Also in her train, though least among them, was Bouton, whom the Secretary always called Mr. Button.

Mrs. Romney had established an intimacy in the house which was quite noticeable, and of course in her wake Roger Macon was always to be found. Mrs. Childs was particularly taken with her, and nothing that went on in the Secretary's house was complete unless Mrs. Romney was present. But Miss Childs did not share in this intimacy ; she distinctly held aloof. It was to my mind an evidence of the pure, unerring instinct in a young woman against—well, let us say the unknown. I was most uneasy at the foothold she had gained, but I could do nothing against it, for she sought me with the utmost friendly affection, and would say, in her soft voice,—

“Stephen is such an old friend.”

Upon such a remark as this I have seen Macon set his teeth sharply and turn away.

As the season wore on, I withdrew more and more from the whirl. I declined every invitation that I could with decency, and whenever I could I failed to appear even at the Secretary's.”

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

During that whole season I never asked Miss Childs to dance. I often stood and watched her as she whirled around in Hargate's arms, or in some other man's, but never in mine.

Sometimes I took refuge with the Secretary at the department, and would always feel a mental brace when he would give me some confidential matter to attend to which he did not care to have his new secretary see. I had not failed to notice that he seemed very much harassed these days, and I heard a rumor floating about town that there was a split in the Cabinet ; but, as such rumors are in daily circulation at the capital, I knew that it was not likely to be true ; he was probably only feeling the stress and strain of public life. I hoped devoutly that he would not break down under it, as some of his predecessors had done.

Just about this time I made a painful discovery. I found that Sandy, whom no one had any time to look after, was getting into mischief. I had twice seen him out on the street when he was supposed to be in school, and when I had questioned him he had given very evasive answers. So I went quietly around to inquire into his record, to find to my consternation that for two or three weeks he had scarcely appeared at school. I felt that I must watch the youngster and set him right without worrying the Secretary. I gave him a severe scoring, and he promised better things.

One night, when a large and brilliant theatre-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

party was in progress, I was very much bored both by the play and by the people in the boxes : so I strolled out into the theatre, partly to get away from the incessant chatter and partly to get away from the sight of Hargate leaning over Miss Childs's chair. Something in his attitude irritated me. As I left, Mrs. Childs said,—

“Don’t go home, Mr. Barradale ; I shall need you.”

It seemed as though I could never get away from her claim upon me ; I felt that I had a ball and chain upon my leg. When I was out in the aisle I happened to glance up into the top gallery, and a pale, boyish face was staring back at me. It was surely Sandy, and with him were two or three tough-looking fellows, much his seniors. I went up into the gallery at once. Something in the set, white face had startled me ; but he must have seen me coming, for when I got there he was nowhere to be found. I was tempted to believe that I had been mistaken. I went down at once to the gallery entrance outside, but he was not to be seen. I looked around for Mrs. Childs's footman, who was standing on the curbstone waiting. I beckoned to him and asked if he had seen Sandy go away.

“Yes, Mr. Barradale, he has just gone from the gallery door, and, sir, I think he was in bad company. I heard him say something about a variety theatre.”

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"Very well ; don't mention this to any one else."

There was a cab at hand. I jumped in and drove to one of the variety theatres, but there was no Sandy. I rapidly ran over in my mind other resorts of a like order, and determined to visit every one, which I did, and unearthed the poor deluded boy in one of them. It needed only a glance at him to know that he was not himself, and it needed only a glance at the faces of the three or four rough-looking fellows in whose company he was to know that the boy was not responsible for what had befallen him. I approached him and laid my hand on his shoulder. He shook me off. One of his companions, whom they called "Budd," said,—

"Come off that, I say."

I tightened my grasp on Sandy. He tried to get away, and said,—

"G'way from here ; lemme 'lone, Steve."

At the same moment the youngster straightened himself, squared off, and dealt me an uncertain blow full in the face. This was enough. Immediately the roughs sprang upon me ; the biggest one, a burly fellow, struck at me with a knife. A demon of brute rage took possession of me, and I laid about me vigorously and to some purpose. For a few minutes there was a fierce scrimmage ; blows were dealt right and left. There was a cry of "police" from some source, but the fight went

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

on ; in the midst of which Sandy went to the floor, his unsteady head and still more unsteady legs being unable to sustain him longer in the scuffle. I don't know how it would have ended, but I know we were all speedily taken into custody by the police ; and when asked my name and residence I had a chance to explain. The Secretary's name was given as bond, and, with my evening dress a total wreck, an ugly gash on the back of my hand, and Sandy in collapse, we were allowed to depart. We bundled into my waiting cab and started for home. On the way thither I had the proud satisfaction of knowing that I had laid out at least one of my assailants, though had I been Van Bibber my record would have been far more brilliant.

My mind, however, was sorely taxed as to how I should get the youngster into his father's house without any one knowing of it ; for Mrs. Childs was entertaining the theatre-party at supper that night, and the whole gay crowd, no doubt, was having full swing. What should I do ? How should I manage it ? The boy was beginning to be very sick, and I might have to take some one into the secret. I naturally thought of the Secretary first, only to discard the thought at once. It might be possible to keep the unpleasant episode from him. Then I thought of his mother, but she seemed out of the question : she would only scold and rail at the boy, and do no end of harm, for our

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

masculine make-up, even in a boy, no matter how much it sins or goes astray, must not be brought up roundly in bold reproof, but must be handled tenderly and the sinner held to the heart and protected; at least this is the mode of treatment we masculines usually demand. So Mrs. Childs was out of the question. The only other person left, therefore, was Miss Childs. Yes, she would have to be the one admitted to the secret; and yet I could not bring myself to let her clear, pure eyes look upon this wretched, drunken boy.

I ordered the cab to stop several doors from the Secretary's house, and proceeded carefully to reconnoitre. Several carriages were standing about, and the house was brilliantly lighted. Evidently supper was in progress. I went up the steps and left myself in with my pass-key. A stealthy glance around the big hall told me that the guests must be at table, for there were gay voices and laughter coming from the dining-room. Just then a servant appeared. I beckoned to him. He came hastily, and, glancing at my disordered appearance, was about to speak. I made a warning gesture, and whispered,—

“How long will they be at supper?”

“They're in the second course, sir.”

“Where's the Secretary?”

“He's at supper, too, sir.”

“Very well, then: come with me.”

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

I led the way out to the street, the man following in a bewildered fashion. I explained, hurriedly,—

“Mr. Sandy has had an accident; help me to get him to bed quietly, and keep your mouth shut. Do you understand?”

“Very good, sir.”

I beckoned the cabman to come to the door, and the man-servant and I together lifted Sandy out and carried him with as little noise as possible into the house, up-stairs, and into his own somewhat remote room. Not one of the gay people in the dining-room below was the wiser. I locked the door and began to undress the boy and put him to bed. When all was done, I did not dare to leave him, for he was beginning to cry in a helpless, hysterical way. I only hoped that no one would come near the door. I knew that when he should finally fall asleep I could steal out in the quiet hours of the night unseen.

About two o'clock a sudden lull fell upon the house, and I knew that the last guest must have gone. I heard the servants come blundering up-stairs; I caught a muffled sound of voices in the corridor outside; then all was still, and I breathed more freely. The boy had finally fallen into a heavy stupor. Just as I was about to leave him there came a light foot-step down the corridor. It paused at the door, and my heart was in my mouth. There was a gentle tap, and yet another; the handle of the



The door-handle was rattled more vigorously, and a frightened voice said, "Sandy, unlock your door!"



IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

door was turned, and a girlish voice called softly at the key-hole,—

“Sandy, it's Conny ; let me in.”

What on earth should I do ? The door-handle was rattled more vigorously, and a frightened voice said,—

“Sandy, unlock your door ; you frighten me when you lock yourself in. Sandy ! Sandy !”

She continued to call in a voice growing in fright. I did not know it was her custom to come to his door every night, no matter how late, to say good-night to him. I was afraid she would arouse the house. I turned the key and opened the door. She stood on the threshold, a lovely vision. She was in *négligée*, with loosened hair, flushed face, and shining eyes.

When she saw me standing before her she became deadly white and grasped at the sides of the door for support. She exclaimed, in utter consternation,—

“Mr. Barradale !”

“Yes, is is I ; Sandy is sick, and I did not wish to disturb any one. Will you come in ?”

She glanced at my strangely disordered appearance, and caught instantly, with her quick eyes, the ugly, gaping cut on my hand and wrist. She turned towards the figure huddled upon the bed ; she noted the red face, the heavy breathing. There was a pause, while wonder, doubt, and fright appeared successively

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

in her face. Then she stepped into the room, shut the door, and said,—

“What has happened? Have you hurt Sandy, or has he hurt you?”

“Neither; Sandy has only hurt himself,” I replied, briefly.

“You left the theatre to-night suddenly, just after the second act. I saw you go hurriedly away. What was the matter? Had it to do with Sandy?”

“Yes,” I replied, and I wondered how she knew that I had left the theatre; she had been absorbed at the time with Hargate. I did not go on; I did not want to tell this clear-eyed, womanly girl what ailed the wretched boy on the bed, and yet her keen instinct was guessing it. She went quickly to the bed. She listened to his heavy breathing, she leaned over and touched his red and swollen face, and caught the fumes of liquor. She turned suddenly, as though she had received a blow, and said, with horror and disgust in her face,—

“Sandy has been drinking. How did it happen? Please tell me the whole truth.”

I did tell her the whole truth; that is, all that was necessary. I went back to the time that I had found him in the streets during school hours. I told of his promises to me, I told of finding him at the theatre that night, and of following him and bringing him home. After I had finished she said,—

“But you are badly cut: how did it happen?

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

There must have been some trouble. Where did you find Sandy?"

I would not name the place of course where I had found the boy, though she would have been none the wiser if I had ; nor would I give any account of the cut on my hand, save in a vague way. All the time she regarded me steadily, with her eyes full of pain and distress. She said, finally,—

"It is perfectly terrible. We must keep this from papa, and we must save Sandy. I have been horribly selfish to neglect the boy, for I have a great deal of influence over him ; and I shall not let him out of my sight for long in the future. Will you help me, Mr. Barradale ?"

She ended her speech piteously with this appeal to me. Then she broke down suddenly and buried her face in Sandy's bedclothes. I seemed to be utterly tongue-tied. I had no word to offer of consolation or sympathy. I could not believe that this sobbing girl was the worldly Constance Childs I had known during the past eight weeks, and I was bewildered. She started up in a few minutes with her face stained with crying and all her beauty convulsed with grief. She dashed the tears from her eyes, pushed back her hair, and said, tremulously,—

"But I am forgetting you. Your hand needs dressing ; you look wretchedly ill. You will let me make it more comfortable for you, won't you ?"

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

I wanted to ask her if it were true that she could be so divinely considerate, but of course I did not. I would not confess how painful my hand was becoming. She got up energetically and moved to the door, saying,—

“Wait here for me, please. I'll be back in a minute.”

She vanished into the dark corridor, and it was some little time before she came back. I strained my ears for the sound of her returning step. When she reappeared she brought a jug of hot water, some bits of linen, and a roll of adhesive plaster. She proceeded to make ready by saying, in a business-like tone,—

“I have attended emergency classes, and I think I can manage this cut.”

She poured the water into the basin and brought it over to the bureau where the light was bright. She took my ugly, bruised, cut, and swollen hand in her soft, firm fingers and examined it carefully and critically, saying,—

“It is a deep cut. I'm not sure but a few stitches would be the best thing ; but I will try the plaster.”

She bathed it carefully. It was a new experience to me, and I scarcely dared to breathe. When it was thoroughly cleansed, she gently drew the edges of the cut together and laid across them strips of the plaster. Then she bound up the whole hand in soft bits of linen. I spoke no word during the whole process. I

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

watched her face, so earnest in its work. There was an expression of womanly concern upon it which, for the time at least, was all for me, and as I stood rigidly quiet I was making the most of my brief reign. She looked up at me suddenly, and for a moment seemed a trifle nervous. She said, with less assurance in her tone,—

“I wish you would tell me how you came by this wound : you are ghastly pale. Are you suffering so much ?”

“I am not suffering at all, thank you,” I managed to say. I did not know where my wits were, what had come over me, or what had happened to me. There was silence again between us. When the bandages were arranged to her complete satisfaction, she said to me,—

“I shall stay and watch Sandy to-night. I will go down-stairs and let you out of the house. You must have something to drink before you go : your pallor is intense.”

We proceeded softly down-stairs. At the foot she turned to the dining-room, and, opening the buffet, gave me a glass of brandy. Afterwards at the front door we paused and stood silent in the dim light of the chandelier. I did not take my eyes from her face. I do not know what I was thinking or looking, but she said hurriedly as she put out her hand to me,—

“I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

for what you have done for Sandy. Good-night."

I found myself standing out in the street, with the door shut behind me and the city bells just ringing out the hour of three.





CHAPTER VII.

TOLD BY CONSTANCE.

I HAVE been trying ever since I came home from Europe to accustom myself to the new order of things, to the new conditions which surround us here in Washington. It is all so different from the old life out in our native region, where the prairies surrounded our little town, where things were on a free and easy footing, where mamma ruled the town and everybody in it. It is so different from the two or three years of Europe, where I worked, studied, dreamed, and lived the life that fills my imagination and meets my ideal of existence. I have breathed this new atmosphere with every faculty alert, every nerve tense to catch the impressions and phases of the unaccustomed life. The first things which struck me were the changes in papa and mamma, and of course in Sandy. Papa has grown older, much older. He looks weary; there is a certain tension or strain in his eyes that is entirely new to me. I cannot help watching him anxiously and listening for every

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

word. I am not satisfied with his appearance. And mamma,—well, the most surprising change is in mamma. She has always been a difficult person in a way, but perhaps she is less so as she grows older, or else it is that this position in the Cabinet has so satisfied her ambition that it fills all the demands of her nature. I cannot get used to seeing her a fashionable woman, a woman of the world. It is astonishing where she learned it or how she acquired it. She must always have possessed more adaptability than we knew of. She holds her position well, and I am less uneasy about her than I had expected to be.

My first view of her at a public function was when I saw her standing in the position that was hers by right in the receiving party at the White House. I watched her nervously. I was just behind the line myself, a stranger in a sea of strange faces. Papa had drifted away from me, and I watched the people, a deeply interested spectator in this mimic American court of ours. I pitied the tired, perfunctory smile of the President. I liked the glittering uniform of the cavalry officer who stood in front of him to repeat any name that he had not caught. I liked the pleasant, easy manner of the women of the receiving party. I thought, in contrast, of the day of the Drawing-Room when I had been presented to her Majesty. Of course the present scene could not compare to it in pomp, stateliness, and magnificence,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

but, oh ! how infinitely I preferred this unpretending party which stood against a line of sofas that had their upholstered backs turned to form a bulwark behind them ! I recalled the saying of Webster in one of his speeches, or perhaps it wasn't Webster, but some other one of our patriotic statesmen who said, "I was born an American, I will live an American, I will die an American." And I felt as I looked upon this plain democratic scene that I was glad I was an American, in spite of the reminders in the shape of the gorgeous court dress of the diplomats that there were countries older in civilization and culture than ours. I was glad, finally, to see coming through the crowd at least one face I had seen before. It was this Mr. Barradale, who seems in some very mysterious way to belong to our family and our household, though his position is not quite clear to me as yet. Sandy says that he is papa's private secretary ; mamma claims that he is hers, and that she could not get along without him. He met me in New York upon landing, and I have seen him at every turn and upon all occasions since.

He is a good-looking man, tall, and at first glance gives the impression of being slight in build, but a nearer inspection dispels this, for he is muscular and well proportioned. Both his physique and his face would call for strength of character. His clearly-cut features perhaps appear too impassive, too indifferent,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

to be handsome, but the firmness of his chin, the mobility of his mouth, and the cool, thoughtful look in the eyes belie the idea of impassiveness or indifference. He has no beard nor moustache under which he can hide emotions or defects of character, and in talking to him one has an unimpeded scrutiny, though perhaps one won't read much in his face, as all is so carefully masked. Taking this Mr. Barradale all together, I should call him distinguished-looking, but just what he is doing in our household I do not fathom, in spite of Sandy's and mamma's explanations, which, after all, do not explain anything.

I was most willing to be delivered from my tiresome position behind the line of sofas to be piloted by him through the crowd and to have people pointed out to me. Everybody we met seemed to be a general, a justice of the Supreme Bench, an Ambassador, or a Cabinet officer, and celebrities were apparently the order of the day. In the course of our tour various people were presented to me. Mr. Barradale seemed to know everybody. He presented a lovely woman, a Mrs. Romney. I don't know when I have seen such a face; I was reminded at once of Knauss's Madonna. Her manner had much repose and gravity, which was an agreeable contrast to the manner of other women near us. Mrs. Romney had a man with her, Mr. Macon. I could not exactly make him out, or his sulky attentions

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

to her. We seemed speedily to have a crowd around us, and by the time papa had joined us, bringing with him several distinguished elderly men, we were holding a miniature court at one end of the vast room. I suppose Mrs. Romney was the attraction mainly, though perhaps I had some right to a part of it. I could not help noticing that there was some curiosity about me, but I was glad when it was all over, and also the Diplomatic breakfast afterwards at one of the Secretaries' houses, and we were permitted to go home and begin our own reception, which took up all the afternoon, with streams of men pouring in through the drawing-room doors, none of whom did we know, save one or two here and there.

There were whole delegations who came in in platoons and were marshalled past mamma and me with little pretence of presenting their names. One man who came in simply shouted his name to each of us in turn, "Kelly of Illinois," "Kelly of Illinois." I shall never forget "Kelly of Illinois." I was heartily glad when New Year's day was over. I felt that I had had a new experience, and I was told that now the society ball would be set whirling till Lent.

I soon found out that mamma was ambitious to be the social leader in the Cabinet, and that she had a series of brilliant dinners, musicales, dances, and the like, mapped out. I was amused to find that she meant to put me for-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

ward as a trump card in her social game, and the little jealousies and scenes that used to mar our life together in the old days out in our prairie home were not to be renewed. I was willing and eager to enter into the fray. There was something in the pace set that filled my blood with tingling pleasure and excitement. It was a new experience to me. I had been puzzled to know how we had been domiciled in so spacious, so *chic* an old house. I knew so well mamma's taste for the ornate that I had expected on my arrival home to find poor papa's eyes and nerves strained by over-decorated, over-upholstered, overdone surroundings, instead of which I found a stately mansion-house, I do not know how else to call it. It suggested an old family, old retainers and heirlooms, things that were as far removed from us as it was possible to be ; for papa made himself, his money, and his name, and I am proud of it ; but I enjoyed the quaint old Chippendale, the queer old china, and the Venetian mirrors. I liked the dark, sombre carvings, the dark, polished floors, and resented the electric bells and the modern chairs mamma had introduced.

Upon our first Cabinet-day reception a sudden light was thrown upon our stately home. I had taken it for granted when Mr. Barradale made the introductions on New Year's day that it was something unusual, or perhaps usual to such a day and occasion, for I remembered the brilliant-looking officer who had performed a

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

similar service at the White House. But as our reception began and this Mr. Barradale stood beside mamma and did the same thing over again I was much perplexed by it. I had remonstrated with mamma all the week previous because she had let him write our acceptances and our invitations, and because he seemed to be doing things not in the sphere of a man ; but she replied,—

“ That's what Mr. Barradale is here for : so don't be an idiot, Constance.”

Of course I said no more, but I wondered what manner of man he was to submit to such an arrangement, such an ignominious position. I felt positively mortified for him that he should stand it for a day. Think of a man, a gentleman evidently by birth and breeding, serving as lackey in a household like ours ! I could not prevent my eyes from wandering towards him, trying to fathom his reasons. I was amazed, perplexed, and finally felt a contempt for him. The indications of strength of character were mere indications, nothing more. He evidently had not a scrap of manhood in him. When our first Wednesday reception took place and he nonchalantly presented name after name, even parrying sly thrusts from some of our visitors, I could not prevent a curl of the lip, which I am afraid he saw. But finally Mrs. Romney came in,—Mrs. Romney with the Madonna face. In her train was the dour Mr. Macon, who would be a

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

handsome man if he weren't so stern and severe looking. Mrs. Romney had not been in the room three minutes when she called Mr. Barradale "Stephen" and remarked that it must be delightful for him to be in his grandfather's house again; and when I could not prevent a look of astonishment, she went on in a sweet voice to explain,—

"Stephen was born in this house: didn't you know it? It was his grandfather's house."

I turned my eyes upon him, and I don't know what expression there was in my face, but it was unflattering to a degree. I made some remark to the effect that I had not been home long enough to be interested in people's private histories. I suppose the tone of my voice was no more flattering than my look had been, for he flushed, and said, cuttingly,—

"It is one of the turns of Fortune's wheel. I am unfortunately the end of an old line, you are happily the beginning of a new one, Miss Childs."

I am not sure that I deserved so rude a speech, and I did not again look towards him. From that time I certainly felt a distinct conviction that Mrs. Romney's Madonna face belied her, and I mentally made a note of her; but mamma seems to be fascinated by her completely.

The rest of that afternoon went swiftly. I liked an Englishman I met, Mr. Hargate, he seemed so genuine, so strong, so much of a

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

man ; but I did not like a Frenchman, Mr. Bouton. He presumed to say something that was slightly *risque*, and when I was impenetrably blank he apologized by saying that his English was so defective that sometimes he confused the "idiom."

All that afternoon I was trying to fathom Mr. Barradale and his anomalous servitude. What had induced him to let papa and mamma actually rent his grandfather's house? Had he no pride, no sensibilities whatever? Did papa and mamma not know of it? Evidently not, or I should have heard of it. I determined that I would keep Mrs. Romney's indiscreet disclosure to myself, for when she had apparently so innocently mentioned the fact I had seen a look pass over Mr. Barradale's face that belied his seeming nonchalant indifference. I was glad to know that he had some spark of pride that could be kindled—— But pshaw ! I was concerning myself ridiculously about him and his position towards us.

After this first Wednesday reception of ours, things came with a rush. I began to realize that I was becoming of importance in the social world. Of course I could not but be flattered by it and enjoy it, but I was not blinded by it, for the fact remained that behind me were papa's wealth and position, and, although I had never been much in the world, I was sufficiently keen of vision to know to what to attribute the greater part of my popularity.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

Papa, whenever he had time to note our doings, was proud of my success, and I read in his dear, strong, worried face the pleasure he felt in me. Mamma was almost tender to me, and there was no jar between us save now and then when she took me to task for being rude to Mr. Barradale or when she chided me for not going to Mrs. Romney's house. As for Sandy, he was my most ardent admirer, and when I appeared in some of my French gowns, for which I soon learned the polite term of description among the girls of the smart set to be "swagger," Sandy would break into enthusiastic and characteristic slang.

I went to balls, germans, suppers, theatre-parties, teas,—in fact, to everything that the fashionable world gave. I could not help noticing as the season advanced that Mr. Barradale appeared less and less at the germans and balls. I don't remember ever to have seen him dance; I concluded that he could not: he certainly never asked me. Mr. Hargate had now become quite openly devoted, and ditto Mr. Bouton,—as much as I would permit him, that is; and I also had the unique distinction of enrolling among my adorers Dr. Ping, of the Chinese Legation. I shall never forget the first time he offered me his arm to take me to supper. I looked at the great, flowing, fluffy, downy-looking sleeve he presented, and timidly made an effort to take the proffered arm. I never found it, though I

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

suppose he had one somewhere, but I groped around in the padded sleeve and finally pinched up in desperation a fold of wadded silk. But Dr. Ping was charming to me. He taught me how to make genuine tea,—an unknown art, he says, in America. He sent me yards of beautiful, gauzy, gilded stuffs. He brought me queer sweetmeats, in flat wooden boxes, which he offered in speech that would make a poet sigh with envy.

I now saw little of Mr. Barradale, for I never descended till midday to breakfast, and after that there was always something upon the cards, and later in the afternoon a round of visits, teas, and receptions. But one afternoon, I remember only too well, a few people had dropped in, and Mr. Barradale happened to stroll into the drawing-room, where we were all waiting for tea to be served. There was something in his quietly indifferent way of acknowledging my salutation that irritated me. I don't know whether the late hours I had been keeping and the inadequate rest for a week or more had told upon my nerves and temper, but when some one in the party chaffed him about having the "inside track" in our family, the insinuation, which he took superciliously, aggravated me and was not to be borne. Without stopping to think how it was going to sound, I said,—

"Mr. Barradale, I am waiting for tea: go and see what is the matter."

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

The words had no sooner passed my lips than I realized that I had made a mistake. There was a look of astonishment on every face, and I could have bitten my tongue out, especially when, without any haste, or without betraying any feeling, he calmly touched the bell and when the footman appeared said to him that I had an order to give, he believed. His tone and manner were superbly well-bred. He was master of the situation, and in a short time, with a polite bow to all of us, he left the room.

There was a constrained pause, then everybody began to talk at once to cover the awkward occurrence. The afternoon was utterly spoiled to me. I had prided myself upon an equable temperament always. I had often stood mamma's little gibes and tempers without a ruffle of my own nature. Papa had once told me that I was remarkably well poised and kept my quick tongue in admirable check. Sandy thought me an angel. And yet here in my own house and before a roomful of strangers I had shown an arrogance, an intolerance, that I have blushed for ever since. The worst of it was that I could not or would not apologize, for I was upon no terms with Mr. Barra-dale. He avoided me most openly, and you may be sure that I did not seek to change his attitude.

One thing had crossed my mind most forcibly, that in this life of gayety that mamma

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

and I were leading there was no room, no time, for papa and Sandy. It seemed to me that papa was daily becoming more silent and lonely and Sandy more uncouth and slangy. I meant each day to be more with them both, but engagements crowded my good resolves out of my mind. It seemed to me that every aim, every ambition, I once had had become utterly dwarfed or had disappeared altogether. I may as well own that to a certain extent I was carried away by my evident success. I enjoyed to the full papa's position and the very evident power his wealth gave us. This may have been ignoble, but it was most natural. I had hitherto seen little of gay life, and I enjoyed the vogue I was having. I was considerably disappointed to learn that I was not popular with the girls belonging to the smart set, and I do not know whose was the fault, but I was annoyed when I heard that I was accused of caring only for men's society. I always felt sure that this remark came from Miss Bellamy : it sounded like her. I was surprised to find out gradually that Mr. Barradale held a most unassailable position in the social world, and there was an evident respect felt for his old name and for the importance of his family in the past. I wondered often, however, why Mrs. Romney called him " Stephen," and she pronounced the name in a purring way that was rather irritating to hear ; at least it was irritating to Mr. Macon.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

I don't know how long I should have been swept along in the whirl if I had not had a sudden shock. Just about ten days before Lent mamma was giving a large theatre-party which was to be entertained afterwards at supper. For a wonder, Mr. Barradale did not excuse himself, though his bored face and manner did not add much to the affair, I must say, and I was considerably puzzled to see him leave the theatre rather hurriedly before the performance was half over, although I heard mamma very pointedly ask him to remain. I wondered if he would come back, but he did not. Mr. Hargate that night was rather *empressé* in his attentions ; he hadn't a particle of lightness of speech or manner, and his devotion took the form of a stolid British stare. Towards the end of the evening, especially at supper, I grew tired and silent, and I was glad when the last guest had gone. After I had exchanged my evening gown for a *négligée* I ran down to Sandy's door, when the lights were out and the house was still, to see if he was all right. I have made a point of this ever since I came home from Europe, for the boy is left so much alone, and he often keeps himself awake to wait for my good-night. What was my surprise to find his door locked and my tap disregarded ! Yet there was a streak of light under his door. I thought I heard some one stirring within, so I persisted in tapping and calling his name softly. I was just beginning

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

to be genuinely frightened, when the door was suddenly unlocked and opened.

I was almost paralyzed with surprise to see Mr. Barradale standing in the door-way. It was not only surprise at seeing him, but surprise at his extraordinary appearance ; for at all times he has been the most fastidiously and fashionably dressed man in town, but now he was dishevelled, he was pale, he was everything that was unusual. I did not know what to do, whether to retreat or to enter. He explained that Sandy was ill, and that he had not wished to let anybody know of it. This seemed so strange that I stepped into the room and shut the door behind me. I looked from him to the bed where Sandy was huddled, and of course I knew that something very much out of the ordinary had happened ; and then I caught a glimpse of Mr. Barradale's hand, which had a long, ugly gash across it from which the blood trickled. He had evidently tried to wrap a handkerchief around it without success. I asked him to tell me what had happened, but he seemed very reluctant to speak, and stood leaning against the bureau as stiff as a post and with his face as impassive and expressionless as a mask. I went to the bed, leaned over, and touched Sandy. In an instant I knew what had happened. The boy had been drinking ; he had been in bad company ; he had drifted into evil ways while mamma and I had been selfishly pursuing our

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

own pleasures. I never felt so condemned in my life as I stood there at his bedside. I broke down completely and buried my face in the bedclothes. I don't know what Mr. Baradale thought of me. I did not care at that moment; I felt my antagonism, my contempt for him fall suddenly away from me. He had been Sandy's friend when not one of us had cared to know where the boy was or what he was doing. I remember I was incoherent, and I think I begged him to help me save Sandy and to keep the whole thing from papa's ears. Then I implored him to tell the whole story, which he did in a curt, bald way, but I gathered some idea of what had happened.

Suddenly I bethought me that his hand ought to be dressed and bathed. I could get no clear idea of how he had received such a cut, but it must be attended to. I went for some hot water, plaster and bandages. Luckily, I had attended emergency classes and knew what to do, although his stiff, unapproachable manner was rather disheartening. He was absolutely indifferent as to whether I did anything for him or not. He was rigid, and his face was ghastly. I asked him if he were suffering. He drew in his breath sharply in a way that belied his reply, and said, "No." There was something in his eyes that made me suspect he was playing the stoic.

I went down-stairs and made him drink some brandy before he went away, and when we got

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

to the front door there was an awkward pause and silence. He seemed to be regarding me fixedly in a most disconcerting way. I was so stupid I could only say a few lame words of thanks for what he had done for Sandy.

When he was out of the house I ran back up-stairs. I was tingling with excitement. I never had felt so alert, so full of energy, in my life. Here was this poor boy to be watched and to be kept from evil, and I had made a discovery. Mr. Stephen Barradale was not the man I had conceived him to be, and somehow this discovery was exhilarating. As I sat by Sandy all through the night, I made various resolves: I would not lose sight of Sandy again, I would give up my engagements and devote myself to papa and him, and, if it were not too late, I would apologize to Mr. Barradale. I had been heartless, arrogant, and worldly; I would be so no more.





CHAPTER VIII.

TOLD BY STEPHEN.

I AM pretty sure I did not sleep much the night that Constance bound up my hand. I tossed about restlessly, now seeing her earnest eyes looking at me, or feeling the touch of her light fingers, now going over again my encounter with Sandy's tough companions, until I scarcely knew myself, so disordered and feverish were my fancies. In the morning things had taken a calmer aspect. The fisti-cuff of the night before had sunk to insignificance, and, alas ! Constance's eyes were less sweet in my memory and the touch of her fingers less thrilling ; for I knew it had been only a brief and pleasant kindness on her part, no more, and that I should find her when I met her that day again wrapped in her cold dignity.

I presented myself at the Secretary's just at mid-day, and found them at breakfast, all but the Secretary. Sandy was at the table, pale and heavy-eyed, and scarcely held up his head. His sister sat near him, and Mrs.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

Childs was complaining in her high-pitched voice about Sandy's ill appearance and enforced absence from school, about my defection of the night before, about the weather : in fact, nothing was right. When I entered the room each of them looked up, but I saw only Constance ; I looked only for her greeting. She gave me a frank, sweet look and held out her hand, and in my quick response I accidentally brought my bandaged hand into full view. Instantly Sandy's head dropped almost down to his plate, while Mrs. Childs said,—

"What have you done to your hand ? and what became of you last night ? I particularly asked you not to go away. We had a horrid time getting home."

I made some lame excuse and apology, and inquired what the programme was to be for the next twenty-four hours. Mrs. Childs answered, with a sigh of discontent,—

"Oh, dear me, Constance and I have to go to that reading at the Bellamys' this afternoon ; then the Secretary and I dine at Senator Jessop's, and afterwards we'll pick up Constance and look in for a few minutes at the dance at the Brazilian Legation ; and after that Constance will go on to the german. You're going to the dance and the german, aren't you ?"

"No, I was not intending to go to either, but of course I will accompany you and see you safely to the end of the evening."

Constance here broke in, and said, gayly,—

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"I have an entirely different programme, and I want you to help me carry it out, Mr. Barradale. I mean to take a day off. I'm going out this afternoon in the cart, for a long winter drive in the country. Sandy is to go with me, then he and I will have a quiet dinner here at home, with you, Mr. Barradale, for company, and afterwards we three will have the nicest sort of an evening together."

Her worldliness had dropped away from her like a shell. She looked at me appealingly. She was pleading for Sandy, but she seemed also pleading for herself and for her past rudeness to me. I gave back an answering look, and lost no time about it. Sandy raised his head for the first time, looking piteously at his sister, while Mrs. Childs said, in consternation,—

"Why, Constance, you cannot possibly cut these engagements. You are to dance the german with Mr. Hargate: his flowers are already here."

"Yes, I know, but I can manage it, and without offence, too. I shall write a note to Mr. Hargate and tell him my reasons. I have made up my mind that I shall give up most of my engagements between now and Lent. I am going to spend more time with papa and Sandy: we have neglected them shamefully lately,"

"Now, Constance, don't be an idiot and do any such absurd thing. Papa and Sandy are

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

doing very well, and you have no reason for any such proceeding."

"Yes, I have, mamma. I am going into partnership with Sandy." And she laid her hand affectionately on the bowed, shamefaced boy, who finally lifted his head and looked at her gratefully ; then he looked at me, and his eyes plainly asked for pardon and for silence. Constance seconded his appeal. We three gazed at each other understandingly, and I for one was strangely elated. Mrs. Childs soon left the room, muttering something about "headstrong girl." As soon as she was gone, Constance said,—

"Mr. Barradale, Sandy has made a clean breast of it to me. He has told me that in trying to rescue him last night you were cut by one of the other men, and that he himself struck you. He is terribly ashamed and sorry : aren't you, Sandy ?"

"Oh, Stephen, I'm so glad you came last night. I never saw any one so quick as you were when you knocked out Tom Budd. I didn't see the rest of the fight, but, by golly, it must have been worth seeing, and I'm awfully ashamed and grateful to you. Will you shake hands ? and will you go with Conny and me when we go for our drive ?"

Of course I assented to this. When Sandy had gone out of the room, I was wondering how Constance meant to excuse herself from the german without giving offence to Hargate.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

She seemed to be thinking perplexedly over something, and said, finally,—

"Mr. Barradale, I shall send for Mr. Hargate and tell him the truth. I am going to tell him that I dare not leave Sandy alone for a moment for the next few days until he is safely over this outburst. I think he will release me without taking offence. I do not know how else to do it, truthfully."

She evidently wanted my opinion, and had I dared to give it, I should have surprised her considerably. I knew enough of Hargate's honest English nature to know that, if this particular girl were to tell him that in order to save a wayward young brother she must forego her brilliant engagements in the gay world and bury herself, it would appeal to him as nothing else could, and would seal his fate. But she evidently had no idea what a strong card she was about to play. She was bent only on saving the graceless Sandy from further scrapes. She despatched a note to Hargate asking him to come in for five o'clock tea that afternoon.

Meantime we set out on our winter drive, Sandy and Constance in her high cart, I beside them upon Stéphane. I had no idea that a winter day could be so glorified. We wound around among the bare, hilly country roads, stopping at the club-house to see the fox-hounds; then afterwards on our way home we came through the Zoo to see the bears fed.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

When we reached the Secretary's house again it was late in the afternoon, and Hargate was waiting. I turned to mount and ride on, but Constance called, gayly,—

“Be sure to come back for tea, Mr. Barra-dale.”

I rode to the stable and put up Stéphane, then returned at once. It was evident to me when I entered the drawing-room that Constance, who had her back to me, had already made her explanation, and that it had had precisely the effect I had anticipated. If Hargate had not been in love before, he was now. He was begging in an undertone to be allowed to come and make one of the home party that evening. He did not care for the german, for it was no longer of any moment to him. The look in his eyes and the earnest tone of his lowered voice were enough. I went quietly away without having been seen. There was zero temperature in my heart, and every drop of blood in my veins had turned to frost.

Hargate belonged to an old family. He was well up in the diplomatic corps ; he would some day be Ambassador, perhaps even succeed to a title. Besides, he was a good fellow. What more could a woman want? while I had not one single thing on God's earth to offer to any woman. I was by birth a gentleman, but I was by occupation a lackey. I had wasted every opportunity in the past, and I was ab-solutely without prospects for the future. I

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

picked up my hat, pulled it down over my eyes, rammed my hands into my pockets, and plunged into the darkening night. I have hardly any recollection of where I went, or how far I walked. I was filled with wild, impotent rage and bitterness. When I had walked myself into a controllable state of mind, I went to the club, dressed, and proceeded to the Secretary's, where I found dinner just announced, with Sandy and his sister awaiting me. It seemed as if I could not rouse myself to respond to their simple gayety, although I made heroic efforts to shake up my dull spirits. When we went to the deserted library afterwards, where an open fire was burning, Constance approached me immediately and said, frankly,—

“Mr. Barradale, I am afraid your injury is more serious than you have admitted : you look downright ill. Let me look at the bandages ; they may need loosening.”

I lifted my hand a moment. She would have taken it to examine the bandages, but I quickly imprisoned her outstretched fingers in mine and bent my lips to them. I barely had time to kiss them with passionate impulse before they were hurriedly pulled away and her eyes looked into mine. They were startled and half resentful. I immediately rallied myself, and replied to her look with as light a tone as I could command,—

“Fealty to the skilful nurse and the good

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

sister.—Come here, Sandy, you rascal, and do likewise."

"Come and do what?" asked the boy, as he lounged about the library keeping one eye upon us.

"Come and thank your sister for what she did for us last night."

"Pooh ! I've done more than kiss her hand ; there's no fun in kissing a hand, that I can see. I'd go in for more than that, if I were you," said he.

We both laughed. Constance had been abashed for a moment when she thought that she had mistaken my action for more than thanks, but Sandy had happily saved the situation. That evening sped all too fast. It was followed by other days and evenings that were as fleeting as they were entrancing, and I could scarcely credit my senses when I realized that I was upon a permanent footing of friendship with Constance Childs. It was dangerous for me, and I was in peril every moment of committing some rash action or uttering words that were ever ready on my lips. Hargate came to the house continually, but as the days went by I became almost certain that he had no chance.

Lent came in, and for a time at least social functions were somewhat relegated to the background. I now began to resume my duties to the Secretary, but he was scarcely the same man he had been the summer before. He was more silent, more preoccupied. It was clear

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

to me that the mental strain was telling upon him. I ventured to ask him about himself in one of our brief talks late one night. He was pacing up and down the library with his hands behind him, and I suggested that he needed rest.

"Rest, Stephen?" he cried, languidly. "Where is rest to be found in this great, restless, seething country of ours? Where can one get away from its continual upheavals, its perpetual jockeyings with its best interests? What it wants to-day it repudiates to-morrow. There is no common interest, no patriotism left in the land. Look at this great department of which I am the head; see what the country expects from it at this present time. I send for this Senator and for that Congressman; I talk to them of the best interests of the government; I impress upon them the importance of laying aside sectional and party interests, and of standing together solidly for sound financial policy. But what good does it do? They go back to Congress and introduce all sorts of wild schemes and bills; they prate of silver and the income tax, and all the while I see the reserve in the vaults melting, melting, melting. Great God, Stephen, who could rest?"

I had never seen him so wrought up; I had never seen him so unreserved. I ventured to touch upon the supposed split in the Cabinet.

"Stuff, Stephen, utter stuff. My policy is the President's policy, or I should not remain

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

where I am ; but I am afraid that I shall not stand the strain physically. I do not sleep well ; I am pursued by a thousand demons of worry when I close my eyes ; I have nightmares of trying single-handed to coerce Congress to some decent concerted action. Everywhere I look in my dreams I see those cursed silver certificates coming in and gold going out to redeem them, and the country howling in my ears from every section. There is no man living capable of steering this country ; no group of men, even though they should band together, could stem or control the elements loose in our midst."

He stood with clinched hands for a moment by the table ; then he said, dropping them to his side and speaking in a quieter tone,—

" My own affairs need looking after. I am much concerned about some important business interests in the Northwest. I need some one continually to look after them." He regarded me steadily ; then he went on :

" Stephen, you are worthy of better things than to be a mere carpet knight. I have been thinking of you lately ; I have confidence in you and in your ability. I may call upon you suddenly. Can you hold yourself ready ?"

" I can and will, Mr. Secretary ; and I feel deeply your confidence and interest in me."

" I am sure of it. I may call upon you any day now ; but not a word of this."

We talked some time longer about his con-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

fidential affairs, and when the night was half spent I let myself out of the house.

During the next few weeks I heard nothing more of the Secretary's hint to me. I now went to the department every day and resumed my work in his office. True to her resolve, Constance devoted herself to her father and brother, and wherever she went Sandy went too. She drove her father out into the country almost every afternoon, and I often accompanied them. I did not let myself think of the future nor of my purposeless past. I lived as so many have lived before me and as so many will continue to live for all time, solely in the present. Constance continued to treat me with good comradeship ; nay, even more than that, she admitted me to an intimate friendship. I was carefully on guard never to overstep the bounds, never to startle her, but it was an herculean restraint I was obliged to exercise. One day when Easter was close at hand and the days had been dreamy and spring-like, with crocuses and dandelions in the parks, she led me on to speak of the old Barradale house, and of my rebel grandfather who had never yielded an inch of his fealty to the Confederacy. She also led me to speak of myself. Her face was very grave when, without sparing myself one whit, I told her of my aimless life, of my unambitious college days, of my half-hearted endeavors at a profession, and of my final surrendering of everything in

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

department life. I related to her also the circumstances of my secretaryship to her father and of my hated social services in her family. I told her that the only time in my life that I had felt the stirrings of free manhood such as ought by right to belong to one was during the three months I had been so closely associated with the Secretary and had for a brief time been in a freer, larger atmosphere than had ever surrounded me before. I told her everything of myself,—that is, everything one could tell to a woman,—but I did not tell her of my affair with Mrs. Romney ; there was my blunder. When I had finished my recital, I said, bitterly,—

“It is a sorry record.”

She was thoughtful for a long time ; then she said, truthfully, with a half-sigh,—

“Yes, it is a sorry record ; but, Mr. Barra-dale, I have faith to believe there is better stuff in you than you have admitted, and also I think that life here at the capital is partly responsible for the inertia you blame yourself for.”

“No, I cannot shield myself behind that excuse,” I replied. There was silence again, during which I watched her grave, thoughtful face, then I said,—

“Tell me of what you are thinking.”

“I am thinking of what you have told me of yourself. I have been used to idealizing men, I suppose ; that is, I have always believed that

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

the men I should be brought in contact with would be, or should be, men strong enough to override fate, or whatever you may choose to call it ; that they would overcome all obstacles in order to reach some high level or place ; and I had always supposed that the man I——" She stopped.

I scarcely breathed. I repeated,—

"The man you what?"

"Oh, well—" she laughed, slightly and uneasily ; then she went on, "In looking around at the men I have met here in Washington I find I shall have to adjust my focus a little, or rather a good deal."

"Yes, we are all a precious lot." Then I added, looking her squarely in the eyes and compelling her to look at me,—

"You were going to say a moment ago that you had always supposed that the man you should love would be the man strong enough to override fate, as you express it, whose life and attainments would be such that you could be proud of them and feel that you had not wasted yourself ; that is what you meant?" I persisted.

"Something like that, perhaps," she returned, indifferently ; and she got up from her chair to leave me. I detained her. I determined to have it out, come what would. I said, with suppressed fire,—

"There was a 'but' in your mind awhile ago which I dare to interpret. You are a

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

worldly woman. You do not want to waste yourself ; you do not mean to. You have the ball at your feet, but you have not found your ideal, who is to master all obstacles, of whose life and attainments you can be proud. Instead, you have found the other man, the man who has missed his opportunities, who is a failure in every way. What of him ? What are you going to do with him ?"

I advanced a step towards her. She looked at me and drew about her instantly that intangible, invisible mantle of aloofness which women know so well how to wrap themselves in, and replied so impersonally and collectedly that I thought she had not understood me.

"The other man, you ask ? Why, he is about the only kind that a woman meets nowadays. He is so much an every-day occurrence and so continually in evidence that he is apt to be passed by." She walked slowly to the door, and then stopped a moment and added, with a change of manner and with a daring look in her eyes,—

"Unless a woman happens, perhaps, to love the other man."

"Constance !" I cried, and I sprang eagerly towards her ; but the door was shut with a bang in my face. What had she meant ? What was I to infer ? Was it only a challenging, alluring piece of coquetry ? I wondered. I would not let a moment pass. I rushed out of the library in quick pursuit, only to encoun-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

ter Mrs. Romney and Roger Macon just being ushered into the drawing-room on the opposite side of the hall,—confound them! I had to stop and be polite when I was burning with impatience to know the meaning of the flash in Constance's eyes. Besides, I also was impatient at the increasing intimacy of Mrs. Romney in the Childs household. Already small innuendoes were being bandied about the town, and Mrs. Romney's name was again a target as it had been once before among the men at the club, as I only too well remembered. When Mrs. Romney had passed into the drawing-room, Macon lingered a moment behind to say to me,—

“Barradale, some of the men are getting up a dinner to be given to Miss Childs, and you are wanted as one of the number. Will you join?”

“I don't know, Macon: I don't altogether like this fashion of dinners where there are eight or ten men present and only one girl and her chaperon. Who is to be the chaperon on this occasion?”

“I don't know; I think it is not fully decided:” but Macon as he spoke did not look at me, and a sudden conviction flashed over me that the chaperon selected was to be Mrs. Romney, and that he knew it. But nothing more was said at the moment, for Constance came lightly down-stairs to greet the visitors, and I turned into the reception-room with her. I found it impossible to catch her eye, even

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

for an instant. She was as cool and as unconscious as though she had not set every pulse vibrating within me only half an hour before. I soon found that the visit in the drawing-room was going to last for some time, so I excused myself on the plea of some important writing that I had to do for the Secretary. As I was leaving the room, Macon said,—

“Be at the club at six o'clock, Barradale; Hargate, Bouton, and the rest want to settle the little matter I spoke to you about.”

I nodded assent and left the room. A little later I went to the club, and at six o'clock I was waiting for Hargate. I wanted to see him alone to say to him what I could not say before the others; but Hargate and Bouton came in together, and I soon found that Bouton could not be shaken off. The dinner was broached at once, and I said to Hargate,—

“Who's the chaperon to be?”

“Mrs. Romney,” he promptly replied.

I said, carelessly, “Don't you think, Hargate, that at a dinner of this kind it would be well to choose an older chaperon?”

“What do you mean, Barradale?” he asked, in surprise.

“Well, Hargate, I somehow don't like the arrangement of these dinners, so many men, one girl, and——”

“But, damn it, man, we are committed already to Mrs. Romney, and I am sure Miss Childs has also heard something of it.”

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"Can't help it, Hargate ; fix it any way you chose, get out of it any way you can, but get out of it you must," I said, with considerable heat.

"What's the objection to the present arrangement?" he asked.

I did not reply, and Bouton looked uneasy. There was silence. At last Bouton spoke up with a slight sneer, and, in half-broken English which I shall not try to set down, said,—

"It would seem that Mr. Barradale gives himself great concern in this matter of dinner. He might himself relieve the situation by withdrawing."

"No, that would not change the situation at all. You may set down my objection to any cause you like; I can only repeat that this dinner as it is at present arranged must not take place."

"You will be trying to carry it with what you call a high hand, Mr. Barradale, and maybe you are meaning to reflect upon a lady who is not without friends."

"I am not meaning to reflect upon any lady; that is scarcely in my line, Mr. Bouton; but I ask you, Hargate, should you care to have your own sister go to a dinner with, say, ten men present and only one other woman, and that woman almost as young as herself?"

There was silence, and both men shifted their positions slightly; then Hargate said, slowly,—

"You are right, Barradale; I shouldn't like

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

my sister to go to such a dinner under such circumstances. I will see what can be done. I will not repeat this conversation, nor will Bouton ; we will try to postpone the dinner for the present, and then we can perhaps arrange it in some other way that will be agreeable."

"It would seem to me, in spite of Mr. Barradale's reason for objecting to this dinner, that there is something more ; perhaps it is a tardy virtue, or tardy conscience," sneered Bouton. The man evidently wanted to pick a quarrel. I could have struck him where he stood, but there must be no quarrel, no words even ; I must keep my temper, no names must be dragged into this. I shrugged my shoulders without replying.

"Oh, come, Bouton, none of that ; Barradale is right," said Hargate, gravely. I had been wondering how Hargate had ever countenanced such a dinner in the first instance, for I knew him to be in love with Miss Childs, and I knew that he had heard Mrs. Romney's name lightly spoken of among men.

Just then several other well-known men came into the club, and I sauntered away. I could trust Hargate to manage the thing discreetly and effectually, unless Bouton should mar everything with his tongue. I little guessed how much this dinner would undo me.



CHAPTER IX.

TOLD BY CONSTANCE.

THE morning after Sandy's exploit, when he awakened from his long sleep and saw me beside him and remembered what had happened the night before, he broke down completely and buried his face in his pillow, crying hysterically. He was only sixteen years old; it was his first misstep, his first shame. I felt the deepest sorrow and responsibility when I reflected that I might perhaps have prevented it. If mamma and I had been ever at home during the last six or eight weeks we should have known that he was falling into evil, and we should have been able to save him from it. The poor boy sobbed on his pillow, and kept saying,—

"Go away, Conny: don't look at me."

I gradually won him to a quieter condition of nerves. I made him understand that I was not going to sit in judgment upon him, and that neither papa nor mamma was to know of the escapade. I told him that I was going into partnership with him, that he was to go with

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

me everywhere : we would have long drives together after his school hours ; we would have our dinner together, and instead of going out to dine, as I had been doing almost every day, I should decline such invitations, and papa, he, and I would spend our evenings cosily at home. The look that came into his face and swollen eyes repaid me a thousand times. He said,—

"Oh, Conny, it's been so beastly dull here at home. I've had to eat my dinner all alone, for even the governor has gone out to dinner constantly, and mamma of course never is home, nor you either, and I don't know what I'd have done but for Stephen. Lots of times he's taken me out to dinner with him and then played pool with me all the evening, and he went round and straightened me out at school last week ; and, Conny, I struck him last night. Yes, I did ; don't look at me so. He came and found me and tried to bring me home, and I didn't know what I was about, and I struck him right in the face."

The boy began to cry again. I said quickly,—

"Come, Sandy, be a man. Tell me this whole story. How did it all happen ? Where were you ? And how did Mr. Barradale receive such a cut ?"

Gradually the boy told me the whole story. It was pitiful. There was an unconscious sidelight thrown upon the occurrence. For the first time I realized the horrible pit that lies at

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

our very doors, ready to catch the stumbling feet of youth, and I resolved that Sandy should not be long out of my sight for the next few years. My task until he should go to college would be to influence him, to interest him, to do my part towards making a man of him. Any one may smile who chooses at my thinking that I could accomplish this, but I felt that I should not fail. Sandy was most enthusiastic over Mr. Barradale's part in the night's performance. According to the boy, he had attacked and knocked down the entire crowd of roughs, and in the boy's eyes he was a hero. I felt that I should have to adjust my focus anew, and more than ever I was disturbed when I remembered my bearing towards him in the past.

I persuaded Sandy to get up and dress and come down-stairs and breakfast with me. A little later, when we were at the table, mamma fretful and tired, Sandy heavy-eyed, shame-faced, and dull, and I, in spite of having sat up all night, full of energy, life, and purpose, I had something mapped out in the case of this graceless young brother that gave me an aim, an occupation. I felt as though I were equipped to do battle with any untold evil that lurked in Sandy's pathway. Some time later I meant to tell papa what had happened, and to enlist his aid as the boy should grow older.

When Mr. Barradale came in finally we were still at breakfast. Sandy, he, and I ex-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

changed glances full of understanding. We all three comprehended that we had formed a triple alliance against the powers of darkness, and that we should take no one into our secret. There was also on my part a tacit asking for pardon for myself. In the light of what had happened I was humble. I held out my hand and sought his eyes, this time on my own account and with no thought of Sandy. I met with quick and intense response. Indeed, I thought it expedient to drop my eyes and not look again.

In a moment or two I announced to mamma that I should cancel my engagements for the rest of the season and devote myself to papa and Sandy. I won't go over mamma's disgusted remarks and her vigorous opposition to such a course. She adjured me not to be an "idiot," and her final remark as she swept out of the room was to the effect that I was a "headstrong girl."

After she had gone, Sandy apologized to Mr. Barradale for the performance of the night before, and I despatched a note to Mr. Hargate asking him to take tea with us at five o'clock; for I had determined to break my engagement for the german with him, and was going to tell him the exact truth. I thought he would not take offence; but I gathered from Mr. Barradale's manner that he did not agree with me.

That day, true to the plan I had laid out, I

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

took Sandy for a long drive in the short wintry afternoon. Mr. Barradale accompanied us on his mare Stéphane. We had a delightful time, though I fear I do not fully appreciate the surroundings of the town, which he thinks are exceptionally beautiful ; but I have not the keen eye for every little touch of nature that he seems to possess. Nothing escapes him, apparently. I am surprised at this. He noticed the changing lights on the purplish hills, and piloted us to a high point from which the city could be seen in a complete basin at our feet. He told us much about the historic points of the town, and was delightfully interesting and earnest. Last and not least among the afternoon's experiences, upon Sandy's insistent demands he put Stéphane through her paces. I never saw such jumps as this creature could make : she seemed one breathing, living mass of steel springs and elastic bands. And not a little was due to the magnificent riding of her master. They made a spirited silhouette against the dull, gray, overhanging wintry sky.

We got home and found Mr. Hargate waiting. I threw off my fur and gloves in the drawing-room and prepared to make tea according to Dr. Ping's instructions. Afterwards I entered upon my explanation to Mr. Hargate concerning the german of that night. I don't know why it should have had such a singular effect on him, but he sat for a long time regarding me without speaking, and I thought I had

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

made a mistake in confiding to him the truth about Sandy. I said, finally,—

“I thought you would understand, Mr. Hargate, and I fear you only think I am taking advantage of an excuse to get out of this german.”

“Understand? Of course I understand,” he replied, suddenly. “I only wish there were more women like you; there would be many a better man in the world, don't you know.”

“Oh, you must not overrate me, or what I am trying to do. You see, Sandy is the only representative of our name, which papa has made honorable and respected, and it comes in my way to protect this boy possibly from further follies, and to help him enter upon his manhood with papa's name unsullied. I must keep him with me constantly, and not leave him to himself.”

Mr. Hargate screwed his monocle into his eye, and said, with comical impressiveness,—

“What a blessed boy is Sandy!”

Thereupon we both laughed; but in a moment he became grave again and sat apparently in deep thought. Then he said, with a curious change from his previous light tone to one of earnestness,—

“Miss Childs, won't you let me take a hand in this scheme of yours? May not I come and be one of your quiet home party to-night? You have no idea how I shine in the home

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

circle, what a tremendous talent I have for domesticity. Here am I, far away from home and kindred, with no one to care how I spend my time. I need home influence too. Won't you take me along with Sandy into your care?"

I did not know just how to take him, the man was so earnest and solemn ; but his proposition was so absurd that I treated it lightly and laughingly.

"I cannot undertake two wayward masculines at the same time, Mr. Hargate ; I am afraid that I must work out my 'home influence' scheme upon Sandy alone."

"Well, may I come every day and find out how you progress ? I may be able to give you a valuable suggestion or two," he pleaded ; and there was a warm look in his eyes which I thought it best not to encourage. So I managed to get into another channel of conversation ; but I thought that Mr. Hargate would never go. He finally went away, however, vowing that he should present himself again the next day.

After he had gone I waited some little time, thinking that Mr. Barradale would come back, as he had promised to do ; but, as he did not, I went to dress for the early dinner at which I was to be hostess for him and Sandy, for papa and mamma were dining out, and we three should have it all to ourselves.

Sandy and I had to wait some little time for

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

Mr. Barradale, and when he did come in there was quite a noticeable change in him since the afternoon. All life had gone out of his manner. He was decidedly listless, though he made valiant efforts to match our simple fun ; but the dinner fell flat, and I caught Sandy eying him perplexedly : he too had noticed the change. As soon as we went into the library I determined to find out what was the matter. His face bore unmistakable signs of some disturbance or suffering. I asked him if the bandages on his hand did not need loosening, and if he were not suffering. I tried to have him let me examine the hand, which in response he quickly raised as if to comply, but instead he clasped my outstretched fingers in his and pressed a burning kiss upon them. There was that in his manner and in the kiss that drove the blood from my heart for a moment and then sent it surging back to my face. I had had my hand kissed in Europe in the way so commonly done there, but this was another thing altogether. I darted a quick resentful glance at him. I was startled and uncomfortable ; but instantly he looked me coolly in the eyes, and said, with an inimitable manner,—

“ Fealty to the skilful nurse and the good sister.”

I never knew so quick or so neat an apology, but I was secretly disturbed by the occurrence, —though Sandy came to the rescue and with

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

one of his boyishly characteristic remarks turned the tide. For the rest of the evening Mr. Barradale was the life of the party, and when papa came in from his dinner, mamma having gone on to a dance at one of the Legations, his expression brightened at the home-like scene made by the open fire and the genial pleasantness. His face was a sermon to me, and I knew how lonely, dull, and forlorn the home had been hitherto, when such a simple thing as the presence of three young people could brighten him so much.

I made him sit down before the fire, and sent a servant for his smoking-jacket in exchange for his evening coat. I lighted a cigar for him and begged him to tell us about the dinner. He gave us a pithy account of the evening and the people; then he said, turning to Mr. Barradale,—

“Stephen, Senator Reagan was there, and I broached to him the pending nomination, but of course they’ll go into executive session over it, and then no one will know till it is too late what blunder they’ll commit. I don’t think anything can be done with Reagan; he’s bound to vote with the silver men on this nomination.”

Immediately papa and Mr. Barradale were fathoms deep in politics. Sandy and I exchanged glances,—we were out in the cold; but I was interested in spite of myself. It was a revelation to me to find how thoroughly papa

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

relied upon Mr. Barradale's judgment in public matters, and upon what intimate terms of equality these two men were. Finally, as papa in his interest in the theme began to pace up and down and to gesticulate as he gave vent to short, sharp utterances, I thought that it was time to put in a word :

"Now, papa, don't talk shop any more : let the old silver question and the bond issue alone. You know you are not sleeping well these days. Let the country go to ruin if it wants to : it has been going to ruin ever since it was born, according to common report."

Papa stopped and looked at me as if to reprove my flippant speech ; then he concluded to smile. He sat down in his chair with a sigh.

"Constance, you are right. Stephen and I always talk shop, but that is because Stephen is the only man I can talk out to with absolute freedom, and I have fallen into bad habits."

The rest of that evening was delightful. Long after twelve mamma came in. She threw open the library door wide, letting in a draught of air, and said,—

"Goodness ! are you all mewed up in this stuffy room, and with a hot fire, too ?—Sandy, go to bed at once : you've no business to be up."

Mamma effectually dispelled us, and we all crept away to our respective quarters, rather as if we had done something to merit rebuke.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

During the days which followed I adhered strictly to the resolve I had made. I went nowhere except where Sandy could go. I drove papa out every afternoon, Sandy going along, and often Mr. Barradale accompanying us on horseback. I had finally established a most friendly footing with the latter, and I was daily astonished to find how much I had misjudged him. He was a man who on an intimate footing might well be dangerous to most girls, for he had an undeniable charm of manner; but I did not feel in any particular danger, for I was doubly guarded by my unsusceptible nature and the fact that he was not just the man I should fancy seriously anyway. I don't know that I admit having an ideal, for I am eminently practical and unsentimental. I think that we end-of-the-century girls don't have many ideals, and certainly not many illusions. We are pretty keen of vision, and I had sufficient worldliness to know that a man who occupied the position Mr. Barradale did would be decidedly ineligible, matrimonially viewed, no matter how charming he might be. I had ceased long ago to think him lacking in strength of character; still, I could not be quite reconciled to his position and occupation. So, taking things together, while I felt the influence of his daily, almost hourly presence, and was sometimes startled and made uncomfortable by the look in his eyes, I was yet in no danger whatever.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

Lent had come in, and social functions ceased to be for the time being the chief end of woman. I could not mistake the fact that I was being sought assiduously by Mr. Hargate, for, true to his threat, he came every day, and supplemented his visits with beautiful bunches of roses and violets ; but neither was I in any danger with him, for he was still less the man I should fancy, and, furthermore, he was not of our nationality, which would always be a bar with me, no matter what my sisters may think on the subject of international alliances.

Just before Easter the weather became soft and languorous, and drives in the country were the most desirable occupation among the townspeople. It seemed to me that if I had not been able to see the beauty in the surrounding hills of the town in winter I saw it and felt it now, though I am not sure in looking back upon that time that I had not already undergone some change or received some silent lessons from nature. For upon all sides were crocuses, dandelions, young leaves, and soft air, which feasted the eye and lulled the senses. I had come in one afternoon from a long drive and ramble in the country, where I had dawdled with Mr. Barradale. He had sought out for me from under the dead leaves late sprays of arbutus, and had made up a dainty bunch of hepatica and bluets. He had decorated Stéphane's bridle with a bunch of them, and had fastened a bunch in his coat

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

that matched my breast-knot of the same flowers. We had come back to town rather silently. Indeed, I had made conversation quite impossible by driving rapidly home, leaving Stéphane far behind. I drew rein a moment on the high ground where we had stopped in the winter to overlook the town. It had undergone the fairy's touch, and was one of the sights that I have many and many a time since driven all the way just to look upon, filled with tender memories.

Later that same afternoon Mr. Barradale came in to ask for a cup of tea; not that he liked tea, but he heroically drank what I brewed for him. We were in the library, and under some spell that possessed me I asked him to tell me about himself and his family, and why he had located us in his grandfather's house. He gave me a sketch of his people, and then went on briefly to record his own career.

It seemed to me that he was bent upon putting himself in the worst light he could, for he was bitterly unsparing of himself, and would plead no excuse for not having made more of his life. He sat leaning towards me. His eyes never left my face, and there was a dumb pleading in them which made my words and my purpose weak and faltering. I was frightened at what I seemed to be calling down on myself. I was not prepared to meet any issue. I tried to give myself courage by reflecting

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

that any girl in my place would be more or less swayed by such pleading eyes. It was enough to make any woman's heart beat.

He asked me in a low voice of what I was thinking, and in my utter demoralization I made some banal remark about having idealized men, and I implied something to the effect that the man I had always thought I should care for would be a man to hew his own way through all obstacles. There was something clumsy in my way of putting it that left an inference of which he was not slow to avail himself. He spoke quietly, but with repressed fire, and each word stamped itself upon my brain :

" You are a worldly woman. You do not want to waste yourself, you do not mean to ; you have the ball at your feet, but you have not found your ideal, who is to master all obstacles, of whose life and attainments you can be proud. Instead you have found the other man, the man who has missed his opportunities, who is a failure in every way. What of him ? What are you going to do with him ? "

As he spoke he came nearer to me. I could neither look at him nor answer for a moment ; then I rallied and made some feeble remark about " the other man " being apt to be passed by, after which I made a rapid retreat to the door, where I paused. Some sudden impulse which I could not control impelled me to add, with a slight significance,—

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"Unless a woman happens, perhaps, to love the other man."

I hurried through the door and shut it with a bang, but not before I heard my own name uttered :

" Constance !"

I dared not pause nor breathe till I reached my own room. My blood was racing through my veins, and my heart was beating to suffocation ; which was singular, for I had convinced myself only a little while ago that I was a worldly, end-of-the-century girl, without sentiment and without illusions, and, more than all, that I was entirely safe from the fascinations of such a man as Stephen Barradale.





CHAPTER X.

TOLD BY STEPHEN.

FOR the next few days I haunted the presence of Constance in the vain effort to get a moment alone with her. I have not the slightest doubt that my state of mind was patent to any one who chose to observe me. I suppose I must have looked something like the fellow in Gibson's drawing which is entitled "Find the girl who has been kissed within ten minutes." But I was utterly reckless of everything.

There could be no doubt about it, she was skilfully avoiding me, and yet her avoidance was so seemingly natural, so apparently accidental, and her bearing was at times so tinged with a divine shyness, that this silent fencing was not without its charm and solace to me. But if she would grant me no opportunity, no speech, she had to endure a steady fire, a constant bombardment, till at last there crept into her eyes a half-helpless nervousness that was adorable. If I could have found or made my chance, then perhaps all would have been well,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

but every attempt to waylay her, to detain or surprise her, was unavailing, any ruse I employed was instantly detected. She seemed to melt away from me, to vanish, to become wholly elusive, and finally I had to desist from my hot pursuit, baffled for the time being.

I was glad, therefore, for the heavy pressure of work in the Secretary's office. During the winter and spring the new Congress, from which so much had been expected, had been behaving with even more idiocy than the preceding one, over which there had been a sigh of relief when it had expired. Important measures were being filibustered over and delayed. The Secretary was anxious, the President was anxious, and the country was discouraged. I had spent nearly every day for two weeks at the Capitol in the interest of the Secretary and his department. I was watching for a committee report on one bill and lobbying another, when I was recalled by Mrs. Childs to do her bidding. The town had begun to waken from the short somnolence of Lent. Easter and the middle of April had come, together with warm, enervating spring weather. The trees transformed themselves suddenly from their bare shivering appearance into a perfect glory of soft, tender green. Overcoats and wraps were recklessly cast aside, and people went about saying to each other, "Isn't it hot?"

It was, therefore, in order for Mrs. Childs to conceive the idea of winding up her already

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

long list of brilliant entertainments with an Easter-week dance, the arrangements for which were given into my unwilling hands. My only consolation was that I must now find my opportunity with Constance. She should dance with me at this ball, and should hear me, come what might. It was some days since she had challenged me with speech and eyes in the library, and I was restless with impatience. I had heard nothing further from the proposed dinner which I had so strenuously opposed. I had not observed that Mrs. Romney had not been seen at the Secretary's for some little time, and I did not know, of course, that a storm was brewing. Hargate had told me that the dinner had quietly been postponed, and that no one knew that any objection had ever been raised to it, save Bouton and himself: so I rested entirely easy, and proceeded with the arrangements for the ball. Everything was to be upon the most elaborate scale; the old-fashioned verandas were to be enclosed, and all the decorations were to be marvels of spring flowers. A day or two before the affair the ball-room floor was being newly waxed, which necessitated to my mind that Constance should try it with me, even though the men were still at work upon it. She almost yielded to my request, but there must have been a warning glow in my face, for she turned my seemingly careless suggestion skilfully aside. Thereupon I said,—

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"You have never danced with me, Miss Childs."

"You have never asked me, Mr. Barra-dale," she returned, making me an old-fash-ioned sweeping courtesy.

"And if I had?"

"Most certainly."

"And you will let me make up for it the night of the dance here?" I asked, following her rapidly to the door, where she was evi-dently meaning to escape me.

"Yes," she replied, rather uncertainly, and not looking at me.

"Shall you go to the Embassy to-night?" I asked, persistently.

"Yes," she again replied, in monosyllabic fashion. She hesitated a moment in the door-way. There was something conscious in her bearing. Then she hastened away beyond any further questions. It was useless to fol-low, for she fled to regions which I could not penetrate.

That night I too went to the Embassy. I walked through all the rooms; I would stop nowhere, save to greet the hostess and to ac-knowledge every now and then a salutation; I was in search of Constance. I saw the Secretary standing in a group of men. He was talking in a low, impressive way, and they were lis-tening eagerly. I heard part of a sentence which gave me the key to their conversation. The Secretary was saying,—

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"It will insure the maintenance of the parity in value of the two metals, and the equal power of every dollar at all times in the markets and in the payment of debts."

A little farther on I saw Mrs. Childs and heard the tones of her voice, so I changed my course and made a considerable détour, only to fall in with Miss Bellamy, who said to me, as she made an effort to stop me,—

"Is this rumor about a dinner true?"

"What dinner?" I asked, scarcely noticing what she said, while my eyes were roving hither and thither with restless eagerness.

"Why, there's been some row about a dinner that was to have been given to Mrs. Romney: I thought you'd know all about it. Bouton's in a great state about it. I must say I think it's time there was a row about Mrs. Romney: she's—"

"I'm afraid I know nothing about it, Miss Bellamy," said I, and I passed on carelessly; but I was nevertheless a good deal disturbed: some one had got hold of it somehow. Just then my eyes fell upon Constance standing within the portières in the smallest and most remote room of the suite; and standing beside her was Bouton, talking volubly, almost excitedly. There was something in his attitude and manner and in hers that arrested my attention. I could not hear a syllable, but I watched them, fascinated. Constance was drawn up to her full height; her face was pale

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

and set. She was protesting ; her hand was slightly raised, as though to ward off something, and her eyes blazed with some feeling that I could not interpret. She turned as if to leave him, but he detained her, speaking vehemently ; then suddenly they both approached the spot where I stood somewhat screened by the portières. I heard him say, distinctly,—

“ It is, of course, as Miss Childs pleases. I but repeat a common report, and I should not have done so much but that I am *méprisé* and, as you say in your English—how is it ? ‘ The worm turns around ’ ? ”

As he spoke she stopped a moment and faced him, and if a woman's glance could annihilate, Bouton would have fallen at her feet. They swept past me. Miss Childs went straight to her father, where Bouton drew his heels together, made a low bow, and retreated rapidly. I understood, of course, that he had been repelled—and that he had not behaved well under it. I immediately made my way to Constance and joined her without delay. She barely acknowledged my salutation,—in fact, she almost ignored it,—and turned to her father, saying, hurriedly,—

“ Papa, I am going home : will you take me to the carriage ? You need not come yourself.”

“ Why, of course, Constance. You look pale. Are you ill ? ”

“ I will take Miss Childs to the carriage, Mr. Secretary, if she will permit it,” I said, at once.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"I will not trouble Mr. Barradale, papa. I am very tired." She turned away abruptly. The Secretary went with her, and I was left in utter bewilderment. I wondered what Bouton could have said that had made such a change in her. She was the Constance I had first known at the beginning of the year, not the half-conscious and wholly adorable girl I had seen in the old Barradale ball-room that afternoon. I went at once to make my adieux; there was nothing to keep me now at the Embassy. As I made my way through the crowd I suddenly encountered Mrs. Romney, who also seemed to be leaving. She looked directly at me with as stony and immovable an expression as that of a death-mask, and passed on. It was the cut direct. I needed no further hint; I had the cue to the situation, or thought I had. It was that infernal dinner that was to blame; but, while the dinner would account for Mrs. Romney's cut, it did not account for Constance's very evident disturbance and haughty bearing towards me.

I pondered the evening's occurrences long and late that night, but could make nothing of the situation. The next day I hoped for a word with Constance, but I did not even see her. Mrs. Childs said something in a fretful tone about Constance being "frightfully used up," and I hurriedly completed the final arrangements for the next night and betook myself to the club, where I found a note awaiting

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

me. It was in a handwriting I well knew. It asked for an interview that night. An hour was mentioned, and it was signed "Sibyl Romney." It was curt, it was cold, and it was to the point. I was in for it now, and no doubt I should have to face the music. There were various reasons why an interview with her was distasteful, and I knew of no good that it could lead to: so when I proceeded to her house it was with decided misgivings.

I well remembered the last time I had crossed her threshold. I had flung myself out of her house with every feeling in me outraged and at war; passion, disgust, and hatred had all struggled for the mastery,—passion for her, disgust for myself, and hatred for the miserable, dissipated man who had claimed to be Romney. The memory of that night, though more than two years old, made me set my teeth. When I was ushered into her drawing-room there was a subdued light softly flooding it. She rose as I entered. It was evident from the traces on her face that she had undergone some keen humiliation or some mental struggle. Her face had ever borne one great charm aside from her undeniable beauty: it was stamped with the grave, sweet innocence of a child that knows no evil, that is trusting and confiding, and yet it possessed the strength and grace of the woman.

She stood a moment looking at me, and then said, slowly,—

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"Stephen, why have you done me this ill turn? Why have you made it possible for me to receive the humiliation I did last night at the Embassy?"

"I am not responsible for any humiliation you may have received, Mrs. Romney: the responsibility lies at your own door, surely."

"But did you not, knowing that I was to chaperon a dinner, break up that dinner? did you not go to the club and before a group of men speak ill of me?"

"I did not," I replied, emphatically.

"But you broke up this dinner?"

"Indirectly, yes; but your name was not even mentioned by me. It is not my way, Mrs. Romney, to speak ill of any woman," I said, looking her steadily in the eyes.

"Nevertheless, I am told that you broke up this dinner, and it has gone all over town; there are all sorts of reports which are cruelly false. It came to my ears a few days ago. It went to Miss Childs's ears last night, with an insinuation that must shake even your nerve."

This shot told. I instantly recalled Bouton's pantomime, his sneering words, and Constance's rigid, freezing manner.

"Perhaps, since you have sent for me and have told me this much, you will tell me what these reports are."

"Yes, I will tell you: they are not pleasant telling nor pleasant hearing for either of us."

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

She spoke bitterly, her voice and manner growing passionate with indignation.

"It is said that you objected to me as a chaperon for Miss Childs, and that the other men fell in with you, and the dinner was postponed indefinitely. There has gone to Miss Childs's ears an ugly coupling of our names, which is hateful. So last night at the Embassy I was made to feel the displeasure of this world of yours, and you, Stephen Barradale, walked about graciously spoken to, while I——"

"Stop, Mrs. Romney ! stop where you are. This is a useless interview, and can lead to nothing but recriminations. These reports are false, utterly so, and——"

"Perhaps their form is false, but you do not deny having 'indirectly,' as you expressed it a moment ago, broken up this dinner, and the world wants to know why. So they fasten upon the only one who is defenceless ; they make me their target," she broke in, contemptuously.

"Mrs. Romney, you cannot expect the world to be more careful of your good name than you are yourself."

"That comes well from you, Stephen Barradale."

"Yes, it comes better from me than from any one else, unless from Roger Macon."

"Take care, Stephen ! take care !" she exclaimed, her face pale and her lips trembling.

My words had struck her like a blow, but I

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

was roused thoroughly. I crossed the space between us and sat down beside her on the divan. She drew away as though afraid of me. I leaned forward, so that I could look into her face. She did not interrupt me, but shrank back into her corner. Something held her mute. I spoke out resolutely.

"I did object to your being a chaperon for Miss Childs at this dinner. You have for months past recklessly dragged your name almost to the verge of the precipice. You have been playing fast-and-loose with this young Virginian, just as you did two years ago with me. You dragged your name then, together with mine, so low that nothing but the blindness or complaisance of this great, overgrown, good-natured town saved you from open scandal. Of course you will say that I was willing to be dragged thus low, that I was willing to plunge with you ; but that is not true. I was at least honest. I was offering you my best ; I loved you with all the manhood there was in me. I remember in my adoration trying to find something to compare your face to, and the only thing that came to my lips were the old words from the Bible, 'for of such is the kingdom of heaven.' I remember how exalted and uplifted I was when I went away from you one night with the understanding that you would be my wife ; and then I remember my perplexity as you put me off day after day whenever I pressed for our marriage. And then the

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

town began to couple our names, and whispers came to me finally that you had a husband living somewhere ; and in a frenzy I taxed you with it. You could not deny it ; and all that night long I walked up and down the river bank, and when daylight came I was stern and resolved never to see you again. But you sent for me, you whistled me back, you cajoled me. Oh, yes,—don't interrupt me,—I was willing, God knows. You played upon my senses. You blunted every feeling in me but one, till my passion for you was the only thing in my life, till I was ridiculous in my own sight and in the sight of the world ; and when I was at last unmanageable and you were afraid of me and did not know how to dispose of me, you brought to light that wretched, miserable man you called your husband ; and, after a scene which I do not think even you have forgotten, I flung myself out of this house and out of your life. You went to Europe till it blew over ; I stayed here and was cut by my old friends. You came back after a year's absence, opened your house, and this obliging town forgot the little talk you had created and took you back into its midst. And now you are playing on this other man just as you played on me, until his face tells its own story, which anybody who runs may read,—till the men about town are holding your name lightly on their lips, till the women are beginning to think it time to shut their doors to you ; and when once they are

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

shut, not even your wiles can open them. You are pursuing a dangerous, reckless course, and you wonder that you meet with humiliations. You think it strange that you should not be able to sow the wind without reaping the whirlwind."

"You are cruel, Stephen," she murmured, while her hand was put up to shield her twitching lips.

"And what about the cruelty of such women as you, Mrs. Romney?"

"Do you think I have not suffered too? Do you think there is no excuse for me?" she asked, bitterly.

I did not reply. I was trying to decide whether it was possible that she had suffered; and as I gazed at her searchingly, various emotions swept over her face under my steady eyes. As if she could bear my scrutiny no longer, she started up suddenly and exclaimed, imploringly,—

"For heaven's sake go, Stephen."

I rose slowly to obey, and she dropped back upon the divan. Not another word was spoken between us. When I left the room she was huddled up in the corner among the cushions, with her face buried from sight.

I rushed out into the soft April night, considerably wrought up. I had told some cold, blunt truths to the woman I had just left, and I was tingling now with the desire to face Bouston for five minutes. I was exactly in the

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

right mood to reckon with him. I went rapidly to the club, hoping to find him there. As I went along, an overwhelming realization swept over me of the light in which I must stand before Constance. Her ears had been filled with insinuations of my old affair with Mrs. Romney : I knew that I had been brought before the bar of her pure woman's judgment and that sentence had been passed upon me. Whatever footing I had gained with her had been ruthlessly swept from under my feet. I had had nothing to recommend me to her in the first place save my old name, and naturally that counted for nothing in her estimate of a man ; but, alas ! even my name was not unsmirched. I stood before her now shorn of every attribute ; there was nothing left for me but to retire from the scene.

I stopped suddenly in my rapid walk, struck with the memory of the grim words of Epictetus : "Zeus, you say, does not do right in these matters. He has opened the door to you ; when things do not please you, Man, go out, and do not complain." Yes, there was always the open door, but I half smiled at the wild flight my thoughts had taken, and I brought myself down to a cool, quiet resolve : I should seek Constance, and, face to face, I would take from her lips her judgment of me, and I would abide by it.

When I finally reached the club, I learned that Bouton had left town, and it was not known when he would return.



CHAPTER XI.

TOLD BY CONSTANCE.

AFTER my momentous interview with Mr. Barradale in the library, when I had been so nearly in danger of being swayed by him, I had taken refuge in my own den. It had been a case not only of retreat, but of absolute rout ; and while I stood wondering how I was going to meet him in the future, cards were brought me. Mrs. Romney and Mr. Macon were in the reception-room. Mamma was not at home, and I should have to receive them. I went down with as cool an exterior as I could command, and found that Mr. Barradale had joined them. The visit was inauspicious in every way, for it demanded not only my trying constantly to avoid meeting Mr. Barradale's eyes, which sought me in open defiance of the presence of others, but also Mrs. Romney's visit was a distinct annoyance to me. Ever since I had heard that there was a Mr. Romney living, it seemed to my eyes little short of effrontery for her to go about with the constant attendance of this Mr. Macon,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

for whom, somehow, I could not help feeling sorry. He was very haggard and unhappy-looking. Mamma told me that I was prudish and old-fashioned when I tried to explain my feeling about these two people, so I ceased to protest against them. I supposed it to be a Washington custom, perhaps. There were many things that had struck my stranger eyes as being rather extraordinary ; and if I made any comment I had always met with this remark :

"Oh, Miss Childs, you know we are so broad and cosmopolitan here in Washington."

This statement invariably closed all discussion. I came to the conclusion that it covered a multitude of sins, and that it perhaps accounted for the extraordinary freedom of speech and manners of some of the girls in the smart set whom I met continually, and among whom I knew that I should ever be an alien.

But upon the afternoon of Mrs. Romney's visit Mr. Barradale did not remain long in the drawing-room. After she had called him "Stephen" twice in her purring way, he abruptly departed. This visit of Mrs. Romney's was the last she ever made in our house.

The next few days were exceedingly trying to me. I had to be constantly on the watch not to be surprised into an interview with Mr.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

Barradale. I hoped to ward off any further explanation until he should understand and withdraw ; and, to my surprise, I had to keep a tight rein upon a certain rebellious inclination within me which prompted me to succumb to temptation. His intense eyes were ever luring me to response or committal, until at last relief came in the shape of papa's calling upon him to resume his duties at the department ; and for some little time our household knew him no more.

At last Easter was upon us, and the social world awakened to new life. In spite of the hard times and the political strain and worry, society was prepared, like a butterfly, to flutter from garden *fêtes* and teas at the club in the country to the heavier, more sombre functions in the stuffy town houses.

Mamma, who is ever to the fore at the mere hint of a chance to entertain, decided to give an Easter-week dance, and I am sorry to think how many thousands of dollars she wasted upon floral decorations which were fresh for only a few short hours. It seemed cruel to twist the delicate flowers into garlands, to twine them incongruously around electric lights, to curtain door-ways and arch-ways with them, but so she elected to do ; and Mr. Barradale was summoned to lend a hand in the arrangements. I heard him trying to persuade her that a simpler plan of decoration would be much better suited to the spring weather and the Easter celebra-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

tion, but it was lost upon her, and the original arrangements went merrily forward.

When I first came home from Europe I had been struck with the lack of energy and alertness among the people I met on all sides, and it was not confined to any particular class. There was a certain lazy passiveness, a certain slowness of movement, which I have never seen in any other locality ; but as time rolled on and I noticed also the want of snap and vitality, the utter lack of all brace in the air and climate, I soon began to understand why no one hurried in this part of the world. Even the dogs and horses partook of this general slowness of movement. But when April brought with it a sudden overwhelming heat, and there were scarcely any leaves upon the trees to protect one, it became almost impossible to throw off the inertia and lassitude that descended upon the whole town. I told mamma that it was positively inhuman to make people dance in such weather, and that the flowers would not hold up their heads an hour after the rooms were filled with people ; but nothing was of any avail.

A day or two before the dance Mr. Barra-dale suggested that we should try the ball-room floor, which had been newly waxed. I nearly fell into this little trap, but luckily saved myself in time. Then he remarked that I had never danced with him. Men sometimes are so sublimely and densely stupid : was it possi-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

ble for me ever to have danced with him when he had never so much as asked me?—when I did not even know that he could dance? I told him that he had never asked me to dance. Of course he wanted to know if I would make up for it the night of our dance, and I assented; and then he asked if I were going to the reception that was to be given at one of the Embassies that night. Again I assented, and I was given to understand that in that event he would be present also. I thought it time to make my escape. I did not look at him as he stood leaning against the door-way through which I wanted to pass.

I had a profound contempt for myself that I did not put on my armor, straighten myself, and look him unflinchingly in the eyes. It had to be done some time; it might as well be sooner as later. This sort of fencing was unworthy of me, it was cruel to him. I had always had a contempt for women who lead men on when they care nothing for them: was I not tacitly doing this very thing? I only needed to stop for a moment, let him have his say, then gravely, kindly, but unmistakably say him nay; it would not take ten minutes. This sort of thing was ignoble in a woman who had as little sentiment as I, who was worldly, who meant to make a brilliant match some day when it suited her. No, this must end now, on the spot.

I made a step forward which was full of

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

determination. I began a sentence in a firm, cool tone. I looked him straight in the eyes, and—I stopped uncertainly; then I turned and ignominiously rushed past him with most undignified haste. When I reached a place of safety, I said to myself, lamely,—

“It was a bad time and place to do such a thing, when the servants were likely to pass back and forth. I will do it to-morrow; it will keep till then. I will meet him to-night in public, and perhaps will wait until mamma’s dance is over; then——” I did not finish the thought in my mind.

That night I went to the Embassy. I had a half-excited, half-frightened sensation of being upon the verge of a precipice over which I did not mean to plunge; and when we, papa, mamma, and I, found ourselves in the crowded rooms, and when we had made our bow to the hostess, I could not prevent a stealthy glance around. Suddenly I was conscious of being an object of attention from several people. This was not unusual, but there was a look of curiosity in the glances which met me that perplexed me. Mr. Hargate joined me, and suggested that we should seek some cooler place, and we went to an alcove where there were open windows. There was something in his manner that was grave and pre-occupied. Once or twice he seemed to be actually trying to stand between me and a loud-talking group of fashionable girls who

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

were animatedly discussing some event. I was too indifferent to catch their words, which were surely loud enough to have been heard on the street without.

When one of them made a movement as if to join us, Mr. Hargate deliberately squared himself and suggested that we should again move,—which we did.

A little later I saw Mr. Bouton hovering uncertainly not far away, and at sight of him Mr. Hargate fixed his monocle and gave him the most absolutely freezing, glaring glance I ever saw. What was the matter with everybody? I wondered.

Just then a message was brought to Mr. Hargate which seemed to necessitate his leaving me. He said, reluctantly,—

“Miss Childs, let me take you to the Secretary : I am called away for a moment.”

I turned with him, but we could not see papa anywhere ; so I stopped beside mamma, and he disappeared. Almost immediately Mr. Bouton approached me, and, with a low bow, said,—

“I am pained that Miss Childs should have any discomfort from these reports ; I did the utmost to prevent them from reaching her ; but I hope I am exonerated.”

“I do not know in the least what you are talking about, Mr. Bouton : I am quite in the dark.”

“Pardon me, then ; I fear I have permitted myself an indiscretion. I will withdraw.”

'IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

He started to leave me, but I felt a most natural curiosity, and I recalled the scrutiny I was undergoing: so I detained him and asked him to explain what he meant. He offered his arm with another of his hideous little bows. I took it, and we proceeded to the smaller of the rooms at the end of the suite.

I shall never forget that room, and I shall never, never forget the air the band was playing. There was a heavy odor of fading flowers, the window was letting in the warm April breeze, and this hateful man was, with shrugs, with hardly veiled insinuations, and with open words, telling me a story that made the indignant blood come to my face and my heart stop beating suddenly, sending a sick, creeping sensation all through me.

When I could command myself and my voice, I broke in upon his stream of words:

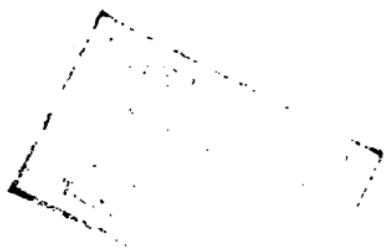
"Mr. Bouton, you shall not tell me another word. I will not hear: it is nothing to me."

"But, on the contrary, it is everything; two ladies are given notoriety by it, and if Mademoiselle will allow me I will stop these stories in her behalf."

"I will hear no more, Mr. Bouton: this story is a gross slander. I care nothing about this dinner nor why it was broken up, but the story behind it is false. I know both the people whom you thus assail, and I know it is false."



Papa stood on the curbstone, perplexed whether to follow me or to wait for mamma.



IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"Ask Mrs. Romney, question Mr. Barradale, or Mr. Hargate, if this story is not what I state it to be. All the town has known it for a long time."

"I command you to be silent."

I turned and walked rapidly away. He followed me closely, and said, with a shrug and a curl of the lip,—

"It is, of course, as Miss Childs pleases. I but repeat common report, and I should not have done even so much but that I am *méprisé*, and, as you say in your English—how is it? 'The worm turns around.' "

I made no reply, but I shot one contemptuous glance at him and gained papa's side without losing any time, where, happily, this man was obliged to leave me. Just then Mr. Barradale, cool, grave, and immaculate, came towards me. My heart gave one throb, then sank and was still. I was still too. I felt as though I had been hewn out of stone. I don't know whether I greeted him or not. There was a look of eager confidence in his eyes as he sought mine: then I saw gradually a look of surprise come into them. I don't know what I said, but at last I made papa understand that I wanted to go home. I pleaded fatigue, I remember, and speedily I was cloaked and making my way to the carriage, whither Mr. Barradale did not follow, for I had curtly declined his proffered escort.

Papa stood on the curbstone, perplexed

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

whether to follow me or to wait for mamma. I soon cut things short by closing the carriage door and saying to the footman, shortly, "Home."

When I was in my own room with the door locked, and when I had pulled off my ball finery, I pieced together the fragments, the insinuations, the shrugs and words of Mr. Bouton, and made a tolerably clear story out of them. I did not stop to think how exaggerated they probably were, how inconsistent, and how long ago it was all supposed to have happened. I was only a young woman who was brought face to face for the first time with what seemed in her eyes base hypocrisy and deceit. This man, this Stephen Barradale, whom I had known so well, with whom we all had been upon such intimate terms, had loved Mrs. Romney, and, knowing, of course, as he must have done, that she had a husband living, had been so infatuated with her that he had defied public opinion and had recklessly imperilled her name, together with his own, until she had been forced to go to Europe to escape the talk of the town, while he had coolly stayed behind and accepted the cut direct from his friends. Notwithstanding this, so complaisant was he that he continued to be her friend, even introducing her into our family; and he himself did not scruple to remain in an intimate position in our household, taking advantage of our ignorance, posing as an exam-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

ple and a hero in Sandy's boyish eyes, and crowning all this by professions of love to me.

I covered my face with my hands. Shame, pride, wounded vanity, and something deeper still, struggled for the mastery. I felt the hot tears drop through my fingers.

I had been posing all the spring. I had been deceiving myself for weeks. I had talked of an ideal, I had thought of a brilliant match, I had been worldly, arrogant, haughty, and selfish in turn ; and then I had offset the list by becoming gentle, friendly, and womanly, which had fast changed into coquetry, coyness, consciousness, and fear.

I had boasted to myself that this man was not one I could fancy, that I had nothing to fear for myself. I was not sentimental nor susceptible ; his occupation, his want of high aim in life, barred him from me. I had even gone so low as to be afraid that I was cruel to him. I had felt that I must end the thing after mamma's dance. And all the time this was pretence. There was no disguise now : I faced myself that night in my room behind my locked door ; my pride, my vanity, trailed in the dust. I loved Stephen Barradale ; I had loved him ever since he had stood by Sandy's bureau in the winter with the blood trickling from the open cut upon his hand. All the winter and spring I had heard this Mrs. Romney call him "Stephen ;" I had heard her say in her soft voice again and again, "Ste-

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

phen is such an old friend of mine," or " You must not grudge me Stephen, I have a prior right;" and I recalled how I had seen this poor, befooled Roger Macon set his teeth and walk away.

What were people thinking of in this benighted town, that they would tolerate such a woman or such a man? And I recalled the tones and shrugs of Mr. Bouton and the glances of curiosity that men levelled at me that night,—I, who was as innocent as any child,—I, who was the victim, though no one knew it.

Mamma came to my room later to know why I had come home so early, and if I were ill. I called back, without unlocking my door, that I was not ill, I was only dead tired and wanted to be let alone. This was not my usual politeness to mamma; but who could be polite with mortification and wounded love battling within one?

After mamma had gone I feverishly went over again Mr. Bouton's disjointed words and insinuations. I recalled everything I could remember concerning Mrs. Romney's frequent visits. I reviewed every incident of my friendship with Mr. Barradale, until I had to cover my burning face as tones, looks, manner, and words came crowding before me. All had been lavished upon Mrs. Romney too, and I could hear her voice in my ears, her soft, dove-like voice, saying, "Stephen." Bah! It was disgusting!

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

No one should ever know how nearly I had come to making a fool of myself. I would take my hurt to some dark corner and plaster it up. It was an end-of-the-century heart that was smarting and crying out. It could not, therefore, be seriously or long out of order ; it was too strong, too elastic, too practical.

But I made up my mind to see Stephen Barradale. He should hear the truth for once, and from my own lips.





CHAPTER XII.

TOLD BY STEPHEN.

AFTER I had failed to find Bouton that night I went in search of Hargate. I wanted to know how far the rumor concerning the dinner had gone, and just what version Bouton had set in circulation. It took some time to run Hargate to cover, and I was just about to give him up when he turned up at the club. We sat in my room far into the night, talking and smoking. Hargate was positive that Bouton had left town to avoid the consequences of his indiscretion, and he predicted that when the affair should become fully known at his Embassy he would undoubtedly be recalled by his government; for, as Hargate wound up,—

“He’s a beastly little cad, anyway, not fit to be in the service. This story will blow over, and will be only a nine days’ talk: so don’t look so gloomy, man.”

But of course Hargate did not know that the whole thing was likely to be my Waterloo; he

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

did not know how seriously my name had been coupled with Mrs. Romney's in the past ; and equally of course he did not know how much I had at stake with Constance. When he was about to leave me after long and friendly converse, I said to him,—

“ Hargate, if I should call on you in a hurry or unexpectedly in the next day or two to close up affairs here for me and to take charge of Stéphane until I can manage for myself, will you do it ? ”

He looked surprised, or as much so as his English nature would allow him to do, but said, promptly,—

“ Of course I will, old man. But surely you don't contemplate anything rash with Bouton ? ”

“ Oh, no. I'm not even thinking of Bouton, although I could break every bone in his body with a will if I could lay hands on him. I am thinking of myself. I may go away suddenly and hurriedly : there is a half-chance of it. That is what I had in mind.”

“ You may call upon me in any way,” he replied, warmly.

Hargate was a thoroughly good fellow, and I wondered how Constance had failed to see all the advantages he possessed and why she had passed him by. We talked a little while longer, and he went away. I was too restless to turn in, so I threw myself down upon a low couch that ran along one side of the room

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

and slept heavily till daybreak ; then I got up, and with a slight change of dress went to the stable where Stéphane was kept, saddled her, and rode out into the open, peaceful country.

The low hills which surround the town upon all sides were shrouded in a soft, purplish-pinkish mist. The first rays of the rising sun slanted across the fields and meadows ; myriads of fine cobwebs which sparkled with heavy drops of dew were stretched across the grass and the fence-corners. The hedges and bushes were just beginning to show buds of tender green, and the whole morning rang with the chatter of the fussy little sparrows as they awoke with the day. There was no sign of life or stir anywhere abroad, save that of nature. Everything was stamped upon my brain with keen vividness, and I remembered it long. It was my last ride upon Stéphane. We came back to town just as the milk-wagons were rattling over the pavements, and the newsboys were delivering the morning papers, and the lazy, idle town was sleepily opening its eyes.

Later in the morning I went to the Secretary's, and found him and Sandy having an early breakfast together. Sandy was grumbling audibly about having to go to school, which, as he expressed it, was a "darned hard grind on a fellow." I walked over to the department with the Secretary. Afterwards I sent several telegrams for him, and, though I

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

transcribed them, their purport did not strike me until late that night. I was so absorbed in trying to forecast the interview I meant to have with Constance that everything else was lost on me. I did not know when or where this interview would take place, but I knew it might lurk in any hour of the next twelve ; after that, the deluge.

Constance was going out on a coaching-trip that afternoon, the destination being the club-house, where there were to be some hurdle-races and exhibitions of high jumping. The whole affair was rather in her honor. Mrs. Childs was to drive out also, and the Secretary was to accompany her if he could get away from the pressure of public business in time. I had been expected to be one of the men to take part in the races and the jumping, but I was in no humor for it, and therefore did not give it a second thought.

That afternoon the Secretary asked me to look up an authority in a certain matter, the papers of which were at his house, and thither I went for them. As I entered the house I gave a glance at the decorations in the reception- and ball-rooms. Everything seemed in readiness for the dance that night. Then I crossed the hall to the library. I had scarcely stepped over the threshold before I knew that my opportunity had come. I quickly closed the door and stood facing Constance, who had risen from a chair and was regarding me

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

coldly. I made that ever inane remark, couched in the form of a question,—

“ You did not go out with the coaching-party ? ”

To this there was no reply. She said, after a moment,—

“ Mr. Barradale, I have something I wish to say.”

She hesitated slightly, then motioned me to sit down ; but I vastly preferred the advantage of standing. She dropped into a deep arm-chair. Behind her was an open window, with the soft April air blowing the curtains apart and the sounds of the street coming in distinctly. She fixed upon me a level, straight look that went through and through me. At the same time it roused all the slumbering spirit in me. I prepared silently for combat.

“ I have heard about this dinner, and I have also heard of other things.”

“ I presumed so,” I replied, quietly.

“ Mr. Barradale, I am going to speak plainly, in a way I never expected to speak to a man. It will not be a pleasant task, but the gross advantage you have taken of us in our family leaves me no choice. The breaking up of a dinner is of no moment to me, but the reason assigned for it is of great moment. It is said that you do not think Mrs. Romney a fit woman to chaperon me ; at the same time I hear that not so long ago your position towards her was such that it created almost an open scandal,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

from which she escaped by going to Europe, and you, who remained, were cut by people here. Yet, notwithstanding this, you introduced her into our home, and you yourself have remained in a position of nearness to us. Now, Mr. Barradale, my creed is that if the woman is to be ostracized, so the man must be. How does my point of view strike you?"

"If your premises were correct, I should applaud your sentiments," I replied, coolly.

"My premises may be incorrect, but what of the main facts?"

"I do not deny them, but the reports you have heard are basely exaggerated, maliciously so. I will tell you the truth if you will kindly hear me." I forced myself to speak calmly.

"But I will not hear you; this tale can be of no possible interest to me."

"But you shall hear me, Constance," I cried, advancing a step towards her. Then I said, more quietly,—

"There is no criminal, however mean, that is condemned unheard." I paused a moment. She said, curtly,—

"Go on."

"About three and a half years ago Mrs. Romney came here to Washington. She came alone, and established herself quietly. She was sad-looking and young; she spoke of herself as having had sorrow and being alone in the world, and people naturally took it for granted that she was widowed. The smart set

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

took her up and made much of her, for she seemed to have money. I fell in love with her promptly, and she gave me to understand that she would marry me. Then suddenly rumors spread over town that Romney was living somewhere in a retreat. I taxed her with it ; she could not deny it, and I made ineffectual attempts to break away. The town began to talk about us, when suddenly Romney appeared and made a scene. Mrs. Romney went to Europe ; I took the brunt of it by staying here and being cut for a time by my old friends. This was a little over two years ago. I have never crossed her threshold since till last night, when she sent for me. This is all there is to the tale."

"It is quite enough, and I haven't much faith in the theory of a woman victimizing a man," she said, contemptuously.

"I am not posing as a victim ; I have taken my full share of the blame in the matter always ; the only excuse for me was that I was honest. I was offering the best there was in me, which God knows was little enough, and I did not know in the beginning that Romney was living."

"This Washington of yours, Mr. Barradale, is a singularly obliging and good-natured town. I suppose it knows of the existence of this Mr. Romney by this time, and yet it continues to look with toleration on her and her affairs, and you, who confess to having been her friend,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

continue her friend, introducing her even into quiet homes."

The tone of her voice, the scorn of her words, goaded me to anger.

"Your words are insulting, and so is your insinuation ; you use the privilege of your sex, knowing you can say with impunity what a man cannot resent. Heaven knows I have atoned a thousand times over my past folly ; but a man cannot go on humbling himself forever, so I shall make no further explanations concerning Mrs. Romney. But one word more : I went to the length of breaking up this dinner to prevent your appearing in public under her chaperonage. I would have done as much had any other young woman stood in your place ; but it would have been particularly galling to have you go to this dinner, for I have committed the ineffable folly of loving you. I have loved you for months, even when you showed your contempt so openly for those of us less fortunate than youself. When your worldliness seemed to dominate every action, and when you treated me with less courtesy than you showed the butler or the footman, even then I loved you ; but I never meant that you should know it, for there was not much in your manner and bearing at that time to win an avowal even from the most courageous man. But when you gave me your friendship, when you listened to the recital of my aimless, purposeless life, when you seemed

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

sympathetic, nay, at times lately even more than sympathetic, I not only loved you, but I felt that I had a right to love you. And now when I stand before you, shorn of everything in your sight, even of my good name, I still dare to love you and to tell you so."

" You have chosen a singularly inauspicious time to tell me this. I don't know what you can expect of me," she said, in a low tone, but without looking at me. Then she rose from her chair, and, turning towards me with her eyes glowing darkly, said, half scornfully, half sadly,—

" I have had a blow, one that has shocked and disgusted me intensely. The men that I have best known have been men that society could not point to nor fasten scandal upon. But men of the world like you, Mr. Barradale, think they can make any use of their lives they please. They run the gamut of experiences, both bad and indifferent, then they come and coolly offer what is left of their lives and the remnant of what they call love to a woman who practically does not know what evil really is ; and they feel no compunction whatever : they consider the exchange of their own sated, jaded emotions for the fresh love of a girl a perfectly fair thing. I should scorn to give my love and my life to such a man, a man who by his own admissions has dragged himself and his name through an affair which, even in the best light, was questionable, and who has made

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

no better use of his life than you have done, Mr. Barradale."

Her words were so many stabs. This was even worse than I had anticipated. I had indeed received my judgment from her own lips, face to face. It was rough and severe, and was more than even I merited, but there was no use to protest. I said, quietly,—

"I have not asked anything of you, neither your love nor your life. I recognize that you are not for me. You have been severe, and as soon as you can think calmly and dispassionately of me, or as soon as you can think of me without contempt, remember one thing only, that, such as I am, I love you. Your ideal man, of whom you spoke the other day, perhaps will do no more than this. Think kindly, if you can, of the 'other' man; he loved you too."

I turned swiftly and walked out of the room and out of the house. A huckster was shrilly calling "Strawberries" outside, and a street piano was grinding out, maddeningly, "Oh, promise me;" the April sunshine was sparkling everywhere; there was the very triumph of spring in every sight and sound of the late afternoon. I went to my den at the club and looked around. There would not be much to pull up: my belongings were of the simplest: a few family relics, one or two almost invaluable heirlooms, were all that I possessed. They were small and portable. I rang for one

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

of the club servants ; there was not a man of them who would not serve me gladly in any way. I gave instructions to pack up everything that belonged to me. I wrote a note to Hargate, ready to be posted later. I sent one to the stable where Stéphane was kept, then I gave a couple of hours' help to the man who was stowing away my possessions. I dressed hastily, dined hastily, and just before eight o'clock went to the Secretary's. I wanted a few minutes' interview with him, and then my distasteful secretaryship would be at an end, and I could turn my back upon the District of Columbia with an easy conscience, though with an uneasy, leaden heart. God only knew where I was going or what I was going to do. My one regret would be in parting with the Secretary. The whole air of festivity at the Childs's was the forerunner of the dance that was soon to begin. I sent word to the Secretary, who came down at once to the library, but, upon finding open doors, bustling servants, and a flood of light everywhere, he took me up-stairs to a retired room that was sacred to his own use. Before I could say a word of what was on my lips, the Secretary turned around upon me and said,—

"What is the matter, Stephen? Has anything happened? You don't look like yourself."

"Mr. Secretary, I am going to leave town to-night or to-morrow morning, and I shall be

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

gone indefinitely ; therefore I have come to——” I could get no further. He interrupted me eagerly :

“ Then you got a reply to that last telegram you sent for me this morning ? ”

I looked at him in utter surprise, and said, slowly,—

“ No, I have not received any telegram.” I tried to recall the telegrams I had sent that day. Suddenly one of them came back to my mind, which had read, “ Wire me the position of affairs ; shall send man with full instructions and authority to-night or to-morrow.” The Secretary spoke again in a perplexed way :

“ I cannot understand the delay, Stephen. I mean to send you out to that bank affair of which I spoke to you several days ago. There is a crisis approaching, and they’ve lost their heads. I’ve been waiting to hear all day, for I could give no final instructions nor send you until I had their message ; but there is no doubt that you must go at latest to-morrow, and I hope you will be prepared, as you said just now, to remain indefinitely. I want you to represent me out there, and when this particular affair is safe I’m going to make you a permanent offer to take charge of my business interests so long as I remain here in office. I can trust you absolutely, and though you have had no experience you will soon learn. You managed admirably for me last fall, and I’ve found out that you have good, cool judgment ;

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

in fact, you have a good head. You are doing nothing worthy of yourself here. I need you. Can you go? You came here to tell me something to-night: what is it? Speak out; let everything be clear before you undertake this mission."

He looked at me kindly and anxiously. I could not reply. I wrung his hand in silence; my own explanation remained on my lips unuttered. Here was deliverance swift and immediate: I could retire from the scene with some remnant of dignity. He talked to me for nearly two hours, stating the position of affairs. I jotted down much that he said. He had already made me fairly acquainted with this affair, and I was beginning to grasp the situation. I finally said,—

"Mr. Secretary, there is something behind this; there is some rascality going on out there. These figures and statements do not fit."

"I'm afraid so, Stephen. You are to find out what it means and act for me."

Just then strains of music floated through the house and the roll of carriages was distinctly heard. The Secretary was sent for by Mrs. Childs, and a message also came to me that I was wanted down-stairs, but I had no intention of appearing or of looking again on Constance. Finally the Secretary had to go below. As he was leaving me he said,—

"Aren't you coming, Stephen?"

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"No : I shall go over these figures and statements again."

He eyed me for a moment keenly, then said,—

"There is something the matter."

But a still more urgent message, one that was a demand, came just then, and the Secretary hurried away. I lighted a cigar and proceeded to make myself as comfortable as was possible ; but Constance's stinging words and repulse of the afternoon prevented anything but a weary going over of the interview, and I was filled with bitter reflections upon men and women and the perversity of human actions.

I walked up and down with my hands in my pockets, until Sandy came into the room with various items of news from the dance below. I gathered that Constance was "stunning," that she had on something "shiny and white," that Hargate was all devotion, and in Sandy's private opinion it was a "dead mash on both sides." I understood also that Mrs. Romney was not present, and Bouton had not turned up either. I learned that I was being asked for, and Sandy counselled me to go down-stairs, "so the old lady would stop talking about it and let up on the governor."

In a few minutes Sandy had swung himself down-stairs for further items of interest, and I threw myself down upon a lounge, listening to the familiar dance-music that beat with regular rhythm in my ears.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

About eleven o'clock the long-expected telegram came, and I sent a footman to whisper to the Secretary to come up-stairs for a few moments. He came hurrying up with as light and springy a step as a boy's. It was found from the telegram that matters were indeed urgent ; but it was too late for me to get off that night. We went over the whole state of affairs again. I was instructed minutely upon every point that it seemed possible would arise ; I was instructed about the transfer of stocks and bonds ; I was given unlimited cheques and unlimited power ; I was told to use the wire freely and the long-distance telephone ; and when our second conference that night was over we found that the ball was over too. The last carriage had gone, the lights were being put out, the flowers were faded, and the Easter dance was a thing of the past. When nothing seemed left to be discussed, when the details of my trip the next morning were gone over, and I had in my pockets all the necessary papers and cheques, the Secretary said, as he grasped my hand,—

“ Stephen, you understand that this is the beginning of years of service ; that it is not merely a short trip, but it means giving up everything here, probably forever. You are sure you understand ?”

“ Mr. Secretary, I understand it perfectly. I am more grateful to you than I can express. I had come here to-night to say to you that my life had grown intolerable in this town, and

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

that I must go and seek some foothold elsewhere. This mission and all that it promises are the beginning of life to me. I cannot thank you enough for opening the way before me. You will make my adieux to Mrs. and Miss Childs. And be assured that I shall not fail in this enterprise."

"I am sure of it, Stephen. Good-by, and God bless you."

With one more grasp of hands we parted, and I went heavily down the silent stairs to the silent hall below. Bits of faded flowers were strewn upon the floor. The yawning rooms gave back a dark, deserted look, but there was a faint streak of light under the library door; some careless servant had left the light burning there. I turned the handle, and as the door swung open it almost struck Constance. She was still in ball-dress, and must have been leaving the room as I entered. Her face bore marks of the utmost fatigue. She was pale and weary; there was something passive in her manner and in the way her bare arms hung at her side. I looked at her intently. I do not know what my own face expressed, but I know that there was a wild feeling of loss surging in my blood. There was a mingling of expressions in her eyes under the gaze I fixed upon her. I don't know that I read one of them aright; I only knew that she was agitated and uncertain, and that she was beautiful. I was conscious that I was about to part from her.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

I stepped nearer to her, and, scanning her closely, said,—

“I hope I have not startled you by opening the door so suddenly. I did not know you were here.”

She made no reply, but there was something in her eyes and about her mouth that made me reckless. I quickly went to her side and looked into her face. I bent my head close to hers, murmuring her name. I gathered her in my arms and pressed upon her lips one, two, three swift, passionate kisses, then I released her without a glance or a word and quickly left the room and the house. I did not see her again.

I went completely out of her life,—just as completely as I went away from the town the next day. My note was posted to Hargate ; Stéphane was to be kept for me till I could send for her ; every tie was severed ; my bridges were burned behind me ; it was “Exit Stephen Barradale.”





HAPTER XIII.

TOLD BY CONSTANCE.

"SLEEP, that sometimes shuts up sorrow's eye," did not visit me the night that Mr. Bouton had paraded his obnoxious words and still more obnoxious insinuations and shrugs before me ; and when morning came I was so tired, exhausted, and wretched in mind and body that I made no effort to descend to our mid-day breakfast. Mamma came up-stairs and fumed about for a while, declaring that she did not know what ailed everybody : when she was a girl, she never thought of staying in her room all day, but girls nowadays could not endure any fatigue. I tried to persuade her that nothing really ailed me, unless it was the malady which an old negro aunty, who sat outside the big market with her head tied up in a bandanna, called "spring fever."

It was evident that the rumors which I had heard the night before had not reached mamma's ears yet, and I would not ask anything about the Embassy reception, for fear I should hear something of the people who were there.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

I did not even wish to hear the name of any one mentioned.

That afternoon Mr. Hargate's card was brought to me with a message begging that I would grant him an interview ; but I would not descend. Sandy came tramping up to my door when his school hours were over, and, putting his head in, said,—

“Hullo, Con, are you knocked out at last?”

I could not even laugh at his slang and nonsense. I did not encourage him to come in, as was my usual habit. I was thankful that mamma's dance did not come off until the next day, for by that time I should be myself again.

When finally I did descend upon the day fixed for our dance, my first action was to send a note excusing myself from a coaching-trip that afternoon ; my second was to see Mr. Hargate. He had come to say something about the rumors that had come to my ears, and to take, if he could, part of the blame that was being heaped upon Mr. Barradale. I of course understood clearly that he had tried to protect me from hearing the remarks that were passing from lip to lip the night at the Embassy. I assured him as lightly as I could that the whole thing was of no moment, of no consequence : I was glad the dinner had been abandoned, and I was sorry anybody had thought it worth while to talk about it. He

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

did not seem satisfied with my remarks, and finally said, bluntly,—

"I only wish to say one thing. I was present when a certain conversation took place at the club, and anything that may have come to your ears has been grossly exaggerated and misrepresented. There is nothing that ought to discredit Mr. Barradale: any old story that has been raked up about him is perfectly stupid, don't you know?"

I could not but like him the better for his loyalty and honesty, but it did not change the situation to me. He went on and talked for some time in a roundabout way of the affair until he took leave of me.

I announced to mamma that I should not go out that afternoon, as I wished to save myself for our dance that night, and she was forced to be content with my decision and to drive out to the club-house, where the coaching-party was to have tea, leaving me at home.

I could settle to nothing. I fidgeted about the rooms down-stairs, idly watching the florists who were bending and twisting the fragile stems of the spring flowers with fingers that made my heart bleed for the tender blossoms. Suddenly a key was fitted into the lock of the outside door in the big hall, which sent me hurriedly into the library and made me close the door behind me softly. I scarcely dared to breathe, so afraid was I of betraying my presence. I was relieved when the footsteps

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

passed to the other rooms, and hoped that there was nothing to bring them to the library ; but my eye instantly fell upon a bundle of papers of papa's which lay on the table. Instinct told me that those papers would be wanted and would be sought for in that room, but it was too late for me to escape.

It was scarcely two minutes before Mr. Barradale stood in the room with the door shut, facing me. It was impossible to know from the expression of his face what his purpose was or what was passing in his mind. He has a way of never looking hurried or flurried. His manner and movements and tones are quiet to the point of exasperation. My own on this occasion were anything but quiet. Oh, how I wish I could go back to that April afternoon, with the sun slanting across the floor ! how differently I would bear my part in the interview !

It lasted only a few minutes. The result might not have been otherwise, but at least I should not be haunted with the reflection that I was hard and unmerciful.

I don't know exactly how it began. He made some opening remark, and I said I had something to say. I told him that I had heard about the postponement of the dinner, which was of no moment to me, but the reason for it was of great moment ; and that I had heard other things. Then I rushed on. I do not remember all that was said, it was so hurried

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

and brief. I know that I almost closed my ears entirely when he insisted upon telling me the story of his affair with Mrs. Romney. I had already made up my mind about it, and I was determined that nothing should alter my view. It did not at the time make any impression upon me that he had not known in the beginning that Mr. Romney was living in a retreat somewhere: the crime, the real crime, let me state it to myself honestly, was in his having loved her at all.

I remember the stern, hard expression of his face when I replied to his story cuttingly, scornfully, insultingly. I remember that he called me "Constance," not tenderly, either, but in a commanding, authoritative tone, that compelled me to listen to his words. He said he had committed the "ineffable folly" of loving me, even when I had shown my contempt and worldliness and had treated him with less courtesy than I gave to the butler or the footman. He spoke of my friendliness and sympathy later, and even coolly hinted that I had shown something warmer than sympathy in my manner which had given him the right to love me, and to tell me of it, even though he was shorn of his good name in my eyes.

If I had at that point quietly and in a womanly way told him the uselessness of his confession and given him his congé, I should feel better in looking back on it; but no, I was not one whit moved by his avowal. I rose in my

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

might, and oh ! I don't know what I said. I dare say I told some truths which were wrung from me in bitterness and disgust. I told him that I should scorn to give my love and life to a man who had dragged his name through such an affair with a married woman, and who had made no better use of his life than he had done. I also said something about the jaded, sated emotion he called love. I don't know how much more of it there was. I was not behaving like the cool, poised, worldly girl of the nineteenth century I had prided myself upon being : I was merely a flesh-and-blood, angry, bitter woman.

He did not protest in the least ; he did not defend himself ; he stood immovably quiet ; only a set look about the mouth testified to the fact that my words cut. When I had said all that rushed to my lips, he replied calmly, while he looked me steadily in the eyes, that he had not asked anything of me, neither my love nor my life, and when I could think of him without contempt I must remember that, such as he was, he loved me ; that my ideal man perhaps would not be able to do more than that ; and then he turned, and, without any haste, picked up the bundle of papers from the desk as he passed it, and left the room and the house. I heard his steps in the stone-flagged hall outside ; I heard the front door shut, and all was still again.

I could not feel that our interview was over,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

it had been so sudden, so bitter. I felt that there must be something more to come ; we were not at the end of it yet.

I dressed for the dance with feverish impatience. I was composed and cool outwardly, but a warm tint in my face betrayed the inward feeling. I had never looked so well or so radiant, and my spirits rose as one after another of the men who came in that night testified, either in words or in open looks, to my appearance.

Mamma became very impatient because papa did not come down-stairs early enough ; and as the evening wore away and Mr. Barra-dale did not appear, she became quite openly annoyed, and, catching sight of Sandy darting about outside the reception-room door, she beckoned to him and sent a peremptory message to both of them to come at once. I was wondering how we were to meet again after the afternoon in the library ; but the crowd would greatly help the situation.

Mr. Hargate came in with an orchid in his button-hole, and looked eagerly to see if I held in my hands the corresponding flowers. I raised the big, soft bunch I carried to my face an instant, and smiled over the top of them in a way that kept him at my side a firm fixture all the evening, as I intended him to be. I danced nearly the whole night with him. Mamma said afterwards that she supposed that I had some motive in making myself conspicuous

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

with him, and that I had danced a great deal more than was decent in my own house, considering how many girls were present.

I don't believe any one realizes the full significance there is in dancing a whole evening with one of John Bull's sons ; for, no matter how many gods and goddesses presided at his birth, or how many noble and good things they bestowed upon him, the Terpsichorean Muse was absent, and according to preconceived American ideas his infant steps were therefore not bent in the way they should go, with disastrous results later in life.

I knew that very likely I should have to face the consequences of my conduct with Mr. Hargate, and I did not care particularly. There was something in his devotion that soothed me and appealed to me. Mrs. Romney did not appear that night, nor did Mr. Bouton : and about midnight papa was called away by a telegram and did not return.

True to my prediction, there was not one of the dainty spring flowers in mamma's decorations that was able to keep its eyes open or hold up its head very long in the glare and heat of the warm April night. A little after midnight I suddenly began to feel like the daffodils and jonquils that were garlanded and twined around the electric lights. I wanted to droop my head, close my eyes, and go away into some quiet, cool spot. The life had gone completely out of me, the color died out of my

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

face, the sparkle and gayety fled from my lips. I do not know what came over me, but it seemed to me that long before the evening was over mamma's Easter dance was a ghastly failure. Mr. Hargate noticed my flagging spirits, and said,—

“It must be a bore to do this sort of thing so often, don't you know?”

I am afraid I was frank enough to agree with him.

Between two and three o'clock in the morning the last guests took their departure, the lights were put out one by one, and the house settled down to the quiet and solitude befitting the sombre night hours. Mamma had gone upstairs with only two grievances concerning the evening, which were the non-appearance of Mr. Barradale and the desertion of papa. I, before going, turned into the library. I had a fancy to look a moment about the room where I had so roughly settled my score that afternoon. I was terribly dispirited and fatigued. I threw myself into an arm-chair, with my head upon my hands, and went over the whole interview, the whole scene with Mr. Barradale. How should he and I continue to meet in the future? Upon what sort of a footing could we stand that would not bring embarrassment to both? And then my mind took a sudden leap to Mr. Hargate. I knew that I should have to face an issue with him in the next day or two. I had deliberately left no door through which I

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

could escape. My conduct that night had given him the right to believe that I would turn to him no deaf ear.

From all stand-points but one Mr. Hargate would be a match that would satisfy almost any American girl. He came of an old and honored family, the head of which bore a fine title, which it was within the bounds of possibility might come to him. There was wealth that would some day undoubtedly be his. He would rise in the diplomatic service; many countries and climes would be known to me, all society the world over would be open to me. He was honorable and a gentleman, albeit a trifle dull. What more? Daniel Webster's words came back: "I was born an American, I will live an American, I will die an American."

Well, I should not have to decide it that night, luckily. I rose from my chair and prepared to leave the room, when I heard a step coming slowly down-stairs. I did not know that any one was still up in the house. Just then the door was suddenly opened, and I had to step back to avoid being struck in the face by it.

My heart seemed to stand still as Mr. Barra-dale walked into the room. What was he seeking at that hour of the night? and why was he here at all? I wondered.

As he came in, I noticed, as if for the first time, the fineness of his face, his straight,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

clearly-cut features, that must have come down to him from some ancestor. He seemed somehow as startled at seeing me as I was to see him, and we stared at each other dumbly. He was uncertain, and finally made some remark about not knowing that I was in the library. I was too stupid to make any reply ; I felt that I had already said all and more than was necessary that afternoon.

He came slowly towards me with a curious, tense look in his eyes, and somehow I was a bit nervous at his approach. I dropped my arms and looked at him wonderingly. I don't know what had become of my anger and indignation ; they were, I suppose, merely in abeyance for the time being. He brought his face very close to mine and looked into my eyes. I stood rooted to the spot. My heart beat to suffocation. I don't believe I could have retreated had I wanted to, or if there had been time. I heard my name spoken once or twice in a tone that I had never heard before, and I was suddenly gathered in his arms and—yes, kissed two or three times over. Then he released me, and, without word or look further, swiftly left the room ; and for the second time that day I listened to his retreating footsteps.

When I was behind my own lock and key, I looked at my grave, white face and shining eyes in the mirror. There was a difference in them. I felt a difference in myself. I was not the same woman who had gone out of that

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

room a few short hours before. I was not the same woman who had danced all the evening with Mr. Hargate, who had flippantly led him on, step by step, who had thought it possible only a few moments ago to make an advantageous international marriage.

Those touches upon my lips, swift as they had been, had changed all the world to me. They had been placed there by one whom I had scorned and flouted, by one who had given them at an earlier time to another ; but there they were, quivering and triumphant, making it impossible for me to do anything but bow to their sovereignty.





CHAPTER XIV.

TOLD BY CONSTANCE.

THE next morning I was awakened by the sparrows that were chattering their matins in the ivy outside the windows, and suddenly a returning consciousness and memory made me feel that they must know that Stephen Baradale had kissed me the night before in the library. When my maid came in later, I wondered if she could possibly know of it too, and when I dressed and finally descended, I was afraid of my own footfall, I was shy of my own presence. I hurried past the library door, fearing to hear some accusing voice from within. It was a distinct ordeal to encounter the butler at the dining-room door, and when I entered the room upon the stroke of twelve and found not only mamma and Sandy but also papa present, I felt sure that a family caucus was being held, and that I was to be tried and convicted over the breakfast-table.

I was therefore rejoiced when my entrance caused only an ordinary morning greeting. It

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

was rather unusual to find papa in the house at this hour, though Sandy often came from school to take his luncheon when mamma and I breakfasted.

Mamma was unusually perturbed upon this particular morning, and even Sandy looked excited. Papa had evidently just announced some bit of news. My alternately flushing and paling cheek excited no remark whatever, so I slipped into a chair and said,—

“What are you telling mamma and Sandy, papa?”

“Why, I drove over from the department to catch you at breakfast and to tell you that Stephen was sorry not to make his adieux in person to you, and he wished me to do it for him. He went off in such a hurry that I am afraid he left his own affairs at loose ends. I thought suddenly of his mare Stéphane, and I want you, Sandy, to go around to the stable and tell them to send her here to us, and tell one of our grooms to look after her and see that she is exercised every day.”

“It is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of. You never told me anything about this bank worry,” grumbled mamma.

“No, my dear, there are very many of my worries that I do not tell you.”

“Papa,” I managed to say, looking up at him, “I don’t exactly understand. Where has Mr. Barradale gone? When did he go? And when is he coming back?”

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"He went this morning. I spoke to him some days ago about this business complication of mine. The telegram came late last night, so there was no time to lose. I despatched Stephen immediately: he will represent me and my interests."

"But, papa, I still don't understand." I stopped. My surprise and secret shock were swallowed up for the moment in the bewilderment of the fact that papa would send a man so untried in business, so unproved in times of grave responsibility, in grave crises, as Mr. Barradale was. The very name of this bank business told me how important it would be to have a strong head and hand there to manage papa's interests. I finally went on with the remark I had begun.

"Have you enough confidence in Mr. Barradale to trust such a mission to him?" I still could not part with my notions concerning the ability of the man who had kissed me the night before.

Papa turned a surprised look upon me, and replied, emphatically,—

"I have every confidence in Stephen. I found out long ago that he has as good a head as any man I know, and, besides that, he has judgment, and a cool tenacity that will fit him exactly for the service I want."

"There, Con, you always did think Stephen a fool; now I hope you're satisfied with the governor's opinion. You didn't even think

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

much of Stephen when he knocked down Tom Budd that time : he——”

But Sandy did not go on ; the indiscreet allusion to Tom Budd brought him up roundly. Mamma said, sharply,—

“Tom Budd ?”

Even papa said, looking at Sandy intently,—

“I heard nothing about knocking down any Tom Budd. What are you alluding to, my son ?”

Sandy suddenly remembered that he must get back to school, and he bolted from the room with the remark that “he’d drop by the stable and have Stéphane sent over.” There was quite a pause ; then papa said,—

“What was Sandy talking about just now, Constance ? Evidently you understand about this Tom Budd. And that reminds me, Stephen seemed greatly disturbed last night, and terribly depressed. He went away not looking like himself. I’m afraid he was in some trouble, but he would not speak of it, and I was so hurried by the urgency of the situation that I did not press him.”

Papa looked at us inquiringly, as if asking for some light on the subject. Mamma spoke up at once, and considerably electrified me by saying,—

“Oh, no doubt he was disturbed. I’ve thought for some time that he was not exactly himself, and last night I heard some rumor that he is in love with Mrs. Romney and is

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

terribly jealous of this Mr. Macon who is following her about. I don't know anything about it myself, and don't care much, but perhaps that is what has ailed him for two or three days. Mrs. Romney was not present last night, neither was Stephen. And, Constance, was not that little Frenchman telling you something about all this the other night at the Embassy?"

Papa ejaculated, "Stuff!"

Luckily, before I could reply, a note was brought in to mamma which required an answer. She rose impatiently, and said, as she left the room,—

"Dear me! I shall miss Stephen terribly."

As soon as she had gone, I said to papa, hoping to divert him from mamma's extraordinary revelation,—

"Papa, how long will this business take to transact? how long will Mr. Barradale be gone?"

"Stephen is not coming back at all. He will not return to Washington. He has gone as my business representative, and when he has closed up this matter, or rather when it is straightened out, I shall make him a liberal offer to look after my affairs permanently. He is just the man I want, and I shall put him in the way to make his fortune. I have rarely been mistaken in character and capacity."

Papa's words sent the blood suddenly away from my heart. I stooped down to pick up

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

my napkin ; I hoped for a moment to hide my face, which I feared was telltale. I raised my head at last with a singing in my ears and a tightening of the muscles of the throat that were suspicious of tears near at hand. His kisses upon my lips were good-by ; they were renunciation, and I had not guessed it. I had persistently, blindly, wilfully undervalued this man all the time he had been at my side, even when I had secretly succumbed to his influence. I had half apologized to my inner self for doing so, and promised myself that it was only a brief madness, for which I should atone by sending him adrift when mamma's dance was over. Well, I had done it indeed, only to find that I was caught helplessly in my own trap, that I was held fast by it and could not cry out.

I had learned, when too late, that there had been one pair of clear, discerning eyes that had read and known Stephen Barradale at his true worth. I had let the man's temporary occupation fix my valuation of him, even though I gave him my heart silently. True, there remained the affair with Mrs. Romney ; perhaps that too could be made to disappear if it could be viewed with papa's eyes. But nothing mattered now : he was gone, and I should have to wipe from my lips the touch he had given them ; I should have to patch up my heart and go on.

While all this flashed through my brain and

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

burned into my heart papa had been quietly watching me. His keen, quick eyes were taking in some new impressions, and I was off guard for a moment.

He had been so absorbed in the last weeks in watching anxiously the Houses of Congress and the fast disappearing gold reserve that he failed to take in the signs in his own household ; but now he was reading them all too fast, as I learned speedily. He did not speak ; so I said, hesitatingly,—

“ Papa, I think I have been doing this Mr. Barradale some injustice.”

“ I have no doubt of it. But, Constance, I’m rather inclined to believe that you know something of what disturbed him ; perhaps even you were the——”

He stopped a moment, and eyed me with new attention. Some sudden suspicion had crossed his brain. I dropped my eyes and restlessly played with a knife and fork. I wished I dared make a clean breast of it all to him. I had no one else to tell anything to. I knew that it was a myth for girls to tell their affairs to their parents, but papa was different. He had been my friend all my life. I remembered when he used to hunt up my dolls for me as a little bit of a girl, when I used to slip my hand into his and tell him all my childish woes. I had never had any mother to cherish me. My motherless, bereft condition rushed suddenly over me. I brushed away the tears

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

that came to my eyes and smiled up at papa tremulously.

"Constance, my little girl, what is the matter? Speak up and tell me. I have been reading more in your face in the last ten minutes than you knew you were showing. Come into the library."

"No, not the library, papa : I'll go to your den."

I was afraid of the accusing library. I felt as if every chair and sofa would shriek out to his ears what they had witnessed. When we were safely in the shelter of this den of his and the door was shut, I found out suddenly that I could not speak, that I had nothing to tell after all. I said, nervously,—

"Papa, I see the carriage is still waiting to take you back to the department : you'd better not keep it waiting any longer."

"I shall always have time to hear anything you will tell me, Constance."

He paused, and I was still dumb. Then he sat down on the big leather sofa and made a coaxing gesture so like what he used to do when I was a little girl and obdurate, that I quickly sat down within his encircling arm and leaned against him. We were both silent ; then he began, slowly :

"My little girl is afraid to tell me what I am trying to piece together for myself. Last night I saw Stephen's miserable eyes and restless manner ; he was anxious to leave town, to

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

leave upon any conditions ; he would not tell me why. This morning I have seen, stupid and blind as I am, your evident consternation and panic when you heard that he had gone. Your face was telltale, though you tried bravely to hide it. I think I see how it is : Stephen has been thrown intimately into companionship with you ; he naturally learned to love you ; he has perhaps even told you so. You have not known what to do exactly. Of course you are not to blame for his loving you, for I feel sure that my daughter has not led on a man just to please her own vanity ; and Stephen has gone away sore and wounded."

I did not speak. Two men's faces arose accusingly in my mind. Papa had guessed a good deal, but not all. I was appalled by his acuteness. I could not speak. He waited a moment, then said,—

"Have you lost confidence in me, Constance ? Can you not trust me as you used to do in your childish days ? I am more ready now than ever to help you."

I sprang up, and said, hurriedly, "Papa, I will tell you everything. May I go back and give you an account of this whole matter from the time I came from Europe ? Have you time to listen ?" He nodded a quick assent, and I went on.

"I will tell you everything, and you may scold me as you used to do, but you must help me."

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

I went back to my early acquaintance with Mr. Barradale. I told papa how he had appeared to me in the menial position he held, and how arrogant and rude I had been, especially when I learned that we were living in his grandfather's house, into which he had precipitated us. Papa had not known this, and remarked, thoughtfully,—

“I wonder I did not guess this long ago. It was a strange idea, his suggesting this house.”

Then I went on and told of Sandy's unfortunate escapade and of Mr. Barradale bringing him home intoxicated the night of the theatre-party, while we were at supper, and of my going to Sandy's room and finding it all out, and of the cut on Mr. Barradale's hand which I had dressed and bound up. Papa interrupted again: he was deeply concerned about this part of the story, and thought that he should have been told of it long ago,

I then told him how Mr. Barradale and I had become good friends, and how I had soon found out that he loved me, but I was so sure that it was a thing I could never return, or encourage, that I felt entirely safe.

So things had gone on until the night of the reception at the Embassy, when I heard for the first time rumors of the hateful story concerning Mr. Barradale and Mrs. Romney. I stopped at this point and hesitated. Papa said,—

“I begin to understand. That was only the

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

other night, when you insisted on coming home early and snubbed Stephen. What is this story?"

I told him the story in plain words. I told him the worst I had heard, and waited for him to make some comment. He said, merely,—

"Go on."

I passed over without mention my own wretched feelings of anger and misery, and went on to my interview with Mr. Barradale in the library the day before, when I had taxed him with this story, which he had not denied. I told of his confession of love to me, and I repeated all the harsh and unmerciful words of scorn I had uttered. I noticed that papa bit his lip and winced. I said,—

"Papa, you don't approve of me; I know you don't."

"You could have been more gentle, Constance; those were harsh expressions to fall from your lips."

"I knew, papa, that of course you would think so; you men always regard another man's peccadilloes with great leniency. Would you have had me fall into Mr. Barradale's arms after hearing such a tale?" I was trying to strengthen my position.

Papa did not answer; he seemed to be thinking: then he said,—

"Well, Constance, this is not all. Finish your tale. Did he defend himself?"

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"No, papa, he did not defend himself : he seemed to grow cold and self-contained. He said I was hard and severe, that I must remember that such as he was he loved me, and that perhaps when I came across my ideal man I would find that even he could do no more for me, and then he walked out of the room, and——"

"And? Go on."

"Well, there's no more; that is, nothing that would interest you," I said, lamely, not holding up my head.

"And you have not seen him since?" persisted papa, relentlessly.

"Yes; after the dance last night, when everybody had gone to bed, he came down-stairs and walked in upon me in the library. I was just about to go up-stairs, and he said a few words, and——" I hesitated; then I looked up into papa's eyes, and said, simply,—

"He kissed me."

"Oh, he kissed you, did he?"

There was the swiftest possible smile around papa's lips as he echoed my words.

His smile nettled me. He noticed it, and said,—

"I am smiling because you have been so careful to throw a strong light upon one side of this tale, while you have kept the other side in shadow; but I can see through a millstone for all that, Constance. Stephen kissed you, you say. And then?"

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"Simply nothing more, papa : he walked out of the room and out of the house."

There was a pause, while I watched papa anxiously. He got up from the sofa and walked up and down once or twice with his hands behind him. Finally I said, uneasily,—

"Have you nothing to say?"

He stopped before me and lifted my face a moment and looked at me sadly.

"My little girl is my little girl no longer. What can I do to help her?"

"Nothing, papa : you see he is simply gone, and I——"

"My daughter wants him back. Yes, I see perfectly."

We regarded each other for a moment ; then papa said, seriously,—

"Constance, your conduct in this whole matter, from your own showing, has been a curious mixture of impulse and motive. You have been both romantic and heartless, both humble and arrogant. You have not seen things with your usual clear eyes ; you have not shown the judgment I should have expected from you. I am afraid my daughter has not been entirely honest in her treatment of this man."

"Perhaps not in the beginning, papa : but do you attach no importance to this story about Mrs. Romney?" I asked, anxiously.

"Well, such things are always a serious detriment to a man ; but I cannot but think from your account of the story that Stephen

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

came out of it well. From a man's stand-point he behaved honestly, even honorably. I do not impeach him. Still, at the same time, it is as well that he is not here to see these eyes of yours, child."

Papa paused, and I, with a swift memory of the harsh words I had spoken the day before, and of the kisses which had meant renunciation, felt a quiver which made me drop my head into my hands and sent the tears trickling through my fingers.

Papa stroked my hair, and said,—

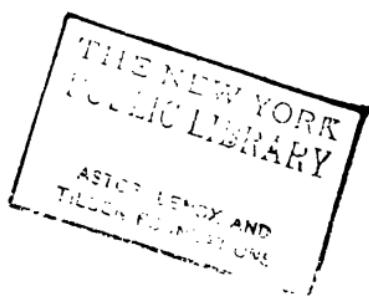
"How like a woman you are, Constance! Don't grieve so, child. It is well for Stephen to go and prove himself to us, and then, perhaps—" He broke off, and said, with a sigh,—

"How much you are growing to look like your mother!"





“Don’t grieve so, child.”





CHAPTER XV.

TOLD BY CONSTANCE.

DURING the next few days that succeeded Stephen Barradale's departure I could not prevent a feverish expectation that something would happen which would change the situation for me. Telegrams came every day to papa from him, and long business letters too ; but day after day went by, and I began to realize, with dull surprise, that everything was actually over, that nothing would ever come to me voluntarily from him again. Papa eyed me in a kindly way, and would pass over to me these business letters, the contents and drift of which I understood ; for papa had gone into the whole complication, and I was able to understand what Mr. Barradale was accomplishing, and I followed as eagerly as papa did the slow and sure unravelling of the tangle. Little did Stephen know what pair of eyes was reading the statements and figures which to the uninitiated would have been unmeaningly dull and technical, but which to my eyes furnished reading of the most intense sort.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

As time went on I became dispirited and languid, and papa began slyly to tease me in his efforts to rally me. If he saw me poring over a book, which was a continual occupation with me, for I was much given to philosophical reading just then, he would ask, "Is it 'Mariana in the Moated Grange' to-day, Constance?" and I would smile dismally at the insinuation.

Once, after several days of unusual lassitude upon my part, papa came into the house and startled the blood into my face by announcing, quietly,—

"I have sent for Stephen, Constance."

"Oh, papa, no!" I cried, in consternation.

"Well," he returned, coolly, "I cannot see my daughter wearing herself out in fretting. She is losing her freshness and her amiability, and I suppose the only cure will be Stephen's presence."

"Now, papa," I cried, with returning spirit, "you have done nothing of the kind; you have not sent for Stephen. I don't want him, and I am not fretting for him, and I mean to prove it to you."

Papa laughed. He had effectually frightened and roused me. I determined that I would be myself again, and that not even his eyes should detect anything of my inner feelings. Ever after that no one, not even papa, saw me when I was not apparently in the very

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

best of spirits. It made no difference what I was, or how great the let-down, when I was behind the lock and key of my own door. But I allowed myself no indulgences, no repinings, in public. I eagerly went everywhere and did everything that this aftermath of a season brought in its train.

It was during these days that I had to face a serious interview with Mr. Hargate ; and if ever a young woman was punished for her vanity and folly, I was that young woman. I felt myself utterly dishonest and criminal as I listened to his straightforward avowal and knew that I had nothing to reply, that I could not even feign ignorance as an excuse. I needed no worse punishment than the look on his face when it dawned upon him that I was saying no ; and I needed no greater rebuke when he did not utter one word of reproach. But there was an expression in his eyes as he looked at me steadily that told me I had forfeited some part of the respect of one manly man. I went about for days possessed with a most horrible, hangdog feeling, and I was almost tempted to call him back and accept him just to regain my self-respect.

Mamma got hold of it somehow, and I thought that I was never going to hear the last of it. She recalled to me the conspicuous figure I had made of myself all during the spring, particularly the night of our dance, when I had scarcely spoken to any other man.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

She seemed to have the most wonderful memory in enumerating the quantities of flowers I had accepted ; she knew all about every branch of his family, and all about their estates ; she counted every advantage he possessed, and when she had failed to move me or to impress me she asked, disgustedly,—

“ What more do you want, in all conscience ? ”

“ Mamma, I am more humble. I want much less than Mr. Hargate can give me.”

“ Well, I expect you'll get it,” she remarked, dryly.

It was now the first of June, and people were beginning to take flight in all directions, and mamma was already talking of summer plans ; but Congress seemed to have no idea of adjourning, and papa said that if he got away at all it would be late in the season. I therefore decided that I should remain with him, no matter how long and tedious the time might be.

It was at the close of a long, warm day that papa came home from the department bringing letters from Mr. Barradale announcing that the complication in the Northwest had been at last satisfactorily straightened out. A final meeting of the bank directors had voted for papa's measure ; the president of the bank had resigned, together with those of the directors who had supported him, and the whole thing was practically at an end. Papa was evidently relieved, and said to me,—

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"What do you think now of my estimate of Stephen?"

I did not reply, and he went on,—

"Stephen writes me that he has been offered a position, and asks my advice about accepting it. But I want his services still further. I am utterly unable to handle my private affairs while I am here in office, and Stephen must do it for me."

"You will need to consult him in person, will you not?" I asked, carelessly.

"No; it can be done by letter, I think," replied papa, with a faint smile around the corners of his mouth.

The days that followed were deadly dull: the only thing that rippled their monotony was the announcement of three bits of news, which were the last gossip shot at the departing, dispersing smart set. The first was that Roger Macon had left town with all his fire-eating Virginia blood up, and it was thought that the ever-convenient and much-mentioned Mr. Romney was in danger of his life. Another bit of the news was that Mrs. Romney had just leased her house advantageously for a term of years and was going abroad, to be gone indefinitely. The third was to the effect that Mr. Bouton had been recalled by his government and had sailed for home. These three events were the direct sequels to Mr. Barradale's little conversation at the club when he broke up the dinner that was to have been given me.

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

It is astonishing how I viewed the whole occurrence now,—how absolutely into the background the affair of Mrs. Romney had retreated and how different a man Mr. Barradale appeared to me. I wished that I might be emancipated enough from custom and tradition to send him one word, a word of apology for my rough speeches,—no more than that. I remembered the letter that the Disagreeable Man had written which he never sent, and I was tempted to imitate it.

One morning I was in papa's den waiting for an announcement of breakfast. I was sitting at his desk. It was scattered over with papers, and among them there was a business letter to Mr. Barradale, the loose sheets of which lay directly under my eye, together with a memorandum I had made for papa which was to go into this very letter. Papa had left it open upon the desk, intending perhaps to add something to it later. Evidently he had not meant to take it over to the department. I was thinking of it, and also I was still possessed with the idea of imitating the letter of the Disagreeable Man. I idly pulled a sheet of paper towards me and began to write as my wandering fancy took me. I entitled it

“The Ideal Man, The Other Man, and the Foolish Virgin. A New Arrangement of the Old Parable.”

I wrote on and on. I quite warmed to my work. I was much pleased with my Foolish

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

Virgin ; but at last, before I finished it, an interruption came in the shape of the footman, who said that mamma was waiting breakfast, and would I please come down-stairs. I hastily slipped my Parable between the loose sheets of papa's letter ; it would be safe there until I should come back, and if any eye met it, it would be an unmeaning jumble.

We dawdled unusually over breakfast that day. Sandy came as usual for his luncheon and went back to school. Afterwards I ran up to papa's den to slip my scribbled sheet into my gown preparatory to taking it to my own rooms. When my eyes swept over papa's table, consternation seized me : not a scrap nor a vestige of any papers, bundles, or letters was to be seen anywhere. I looked around the room hastily. Everything was in strict order. I pressed the bell-button with sudden energy. When a maid appeared I asked her if she had removed any of the papers from the desk. She said that she had not, but that while we were at breakfast the messenger had come from the department with an order from the Secretary to send him all the papers and letters that were on the desk in his private room. They had all been gathered up, with a rubber band around them, and delivered to the messenger.

I ran down-stairs and summoned a servant. I despatched him to the stable with instructions to have my cart sent around and a groom to accompany me. Mamma said,—

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

"Why, Constance, it is not two o'clock, and the sun is terribly hot: where are you going at this hour?"

I don't know what I replied. I had but one idea, to get possession of my idiotic scribble which had gone to the department and would come under papa's eye, or perhaps be seen by his private secretary. It was not long before I was driving my spirited young horse over the warm, soft pavements. When we reached the department I hesitated. I disliked to enter the building and encounter curious eyes, but I must do it, and lose no time. I was soon standing at the entrance of papa's anteroom, and in another minute I was asking for him. I was met with the reply that papa was attending a meeting of the Cabinet. I had forgotten that it was Cabinet day. I asked for his private secretary, and was told that he had just gone out with some important papers. I then asked to be allowed to go into papa's private room and wait for him; but there was a decided demur to this: no one was allowed in that room unless invited by the Secretary himself, except, of course, his private secretary. I thereupon had to disclose my identity, and was reluctantly allowed to enter at last. I sat down at the desk and began to scan all the papers that were within range of my eye. I finally became nervous as I nowhere saw the least sign of what I was seeking. I rapidly turned over everything that lay on the desk,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

but nothing rewarded me. I opened various drawers. It was in vain. I waited impatiently till three o'clock ; then a messenger came in to say that the Secretary had sent word that he should not be back again that day : he had gone to the Capitol, whither his private secretary had gone also. Upon this there was nothing to do but to return home.

The wildest feeling of dread had taken possession of me. My idiotic Parable might now be between the sheets of papa's business letter to Mr. Barradale, which perhaps was lying in the post-office or already on its way West to him. This was too unspeakably dreadful for me to dwell upon. I tried to turn my thoughts elsewhere and to find a thousand ways out of the situation. I thought the day would never end. I made a copy from memory of my Foolish Virgin. I wanted to recall the full extent of my idiocy.

I drove out in the late afternoon with mamma, just to help pass the time until I could see papa. I thought dinner would never be over and the servants never be gone. Papa looked awfully tired, but at last he rose to go to the library. I lighted his cigar for him and followed him. I shut the library door, and asked, breathlessly,—

“Papa, you sent a messenger to-day for the papers that were on your desk up-stairs : what did you do with the papers and the letter when you got them?”

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

Papa looked at me in surprise, and said,—

“ Why, let me see ; I sent for them because there was an important paper in one of the bundles, and there was a letter to Stephen I forgot to mail this morning. My secretary brought them to me at the Capitol after the Cabinet meeting : the paper I sent in to the committee, and the letter I mailed. I don't think that there was anything else. Why do you ask ?”

“ Did you read over this letter to Mr. Barra-dale ?”

“ Why, I don't remember. I have been bothered to death to-day, and I don't know whether I read the letter or not : I'm under the impression that I did not.”

“ But, papa, try to think : was there any-thing among the sheets in my handwriting ?”

“ Yes, there was something in your scribble, but it was a memorandum, I think, that you made for me.”

“ Oh, papa, do try to be more certain ; think as hard as you can. Was there no loose sheet with a long rigmarole on it in my handwriting among any of those papers to-day ?”

“ I did not see any. I took the sheets of my letter to Stephen and folded them just as they were, with your memorandum on top. I sealed the letter on the floor of the Senate at Jessop's desk. I called a page and sent it to the Senate post-office. The other papers I ran my eye over and gave back to my secretary,

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

and he afterwards took them to the department. But why all this anxiety, Constance? What has happened?"

I stared blankly at papa. I was entirely undone. What should I do? My folly was inconceivable. The queer chance that had caught my folly in its toils was also inconceivable.

Gradually I told papa, lamely, shamefacedly, of my Parable of the Foolish Virgin, of having left it between the sheets of his letter to Stephen while I went to breakfast, and of my finding the whole contents of the desk gone on my return. I told of going to the department and ransacking his desk there, and I wound up with,—

"I suppose it has gone steaming out West by this time. I shall never hold up my head again."

As I unfolded my tale, papa's tired look vanished, his face lightened, and finally, when I wound up my recital, he was actually smiling with quiet and intense amusement.

"Papa," I exclaimed, "I believe that you have that wretched thing in your pocket this minute and you are teasing me."

"No, Constance, I have not even seen it. If I had, though, I am not sure that I should have foiled its very evident mission. So my little girl thought she would be literary,—thought she would improve on the old Bible version of the Ten Virgins? I wonder that

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

you don't see the exquisite humor of the situation."

" You are utterly heartless to laugh at me. I've made a fool of myself, and I don't think it is funny at all."

" But, Constance, are you sure that Stephen will apply it?—that he will understand it?"

" Oh, yes, there's no chance of his not understanding it; and he knows my handwriting. He will think it a scheme on my part. What shall I do?"

" Why, stand by it, Constance; show your courage; whatever comes, meet it and bear it as my daughter should. There is no shame in loving a man; there is no shame in atoning for a mistake. He will write to you, or I am much mistaken, and then you must be honest with him."

" And, papa, you don't mind? You don't object?"

" Yes, I shall mind very much," he said, putting his hand on my head.

" But, papa, suppose that he doesn't understand or write?"

" But he will. Suppose, Constance, that you show me this remarkable production of yours, and let me judge. You say you copied it from memory."

I went hurriedly and brought the obnoxious writing, and handed it anxiously to papa. He put on his glasses and read:

" The Ideal Man, The Other Man, and the

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

Foolish Virgin. A New Arrangement of the Old Parable.

"A foolish Virgin, with lamp unlighted and eyes blinded by darkness, went forth to meet the bridegroom. In the recesses of her mind a glorious vision lay, which was like the kingdom of heaven. This vision was a figure, radiant and godlike. In his outstretched hands he held all the gifts that were blest and goodly in her sight. Under his feet were obstacles that had been trodden down to earth; they were poverty, lack of purpose, untoward circumstances, and failure. Upon his brow were written, in letters of gold, success, power, riches. This radiant vision led her on and on, through all the turnings of her groping way, and when she came to the narrow opening where he would stand with welcoming arms in the broad light of day, lo! he was not there. She rubbed her eyes to see the better, and held her unlighted lamp close to her breast; but her half-blinded vision saw no godlike form. Instead there stood before her a suppliant, almost empty-handed, but with shining eyes. Partly crushed under his feet were success, ambition, and purpose. Upon his brow, in plain letters of ivory, there was but one single word, in his outstretched hands there was but one single gift, and in his eyes there was one steady light. It was Love. The Virgin turned. She heeded not the one gift he offered; she heeded not the outstretched arms. She did not know this

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

stranger. She fled back by the dark and winding way she had come : then she heard a voice sternly rebuking. It said to her, 'Thou art blind : light thy lamp ; go forth again : thou hast met an angel unawares.' The golden vision was suddenly swept from her mind. She saw instead, with awakening heart, the shining eyes, the outstretched arms, the one word in ivory. She trimmed her lamp, and with quick and eager steps hurried once more through the winding way, which was no longer dark. When the narrow opening was reached, lo ! the door was shut. The Virgin knocked, and cried, 'Open unto me,' but a voice came back and said, 'Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.' She tremblingly said again, with imploring accents,—

“ ‘The Angel of love awaits me. I pray you open unto me.’

“ But the same voice uttered again the words, ‘Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.’ Still she called,—

“ ‘Deny me not ; I have awakened to love, I have atoned.’ ”

Papa took off his glasses, and said,—

“ If Stephen finds this between the leaves of my letter to him, he will be dense indeed if he does not understand. If I were in his shoes it would bring me from the ends of the earth.”

I covered my face in shame, and said,—

“ I did not know how horribly it betrays me until now.”

IN SIGHT OF THE GODDESS

The next few days were feverishly lived through. I made papa search every paper that had been sent from his desk to the department ; I made him question both the messenger and his private secretary ; but it was in vain. I was afraid of every letter that was delivered at the house ; I was secretly more afraid when none were delivered at all.

At the end of three days it came. It was no letter, no long-looked-for, secretly-coveted letter. It was short, it was terse ; it was one sentence enclosed in a yellow envelope and stamped "Western Union." It read,—

"To Miss CONSTANCE CHILDS, Washington,
D.C.

"I leave for Washington immediately, to
claim fulfilment of the Parable.

"STEPHEN BARRADALE."

THE END.

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